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MUSLIM WOMEN, AGENCY AND RESISTANCE POLITICS

The Case of Kashmir

Inshah Malik



Muslim Women, Agency and Resistance Politics

“Kashmir is a site of political conflict where the production of knowledge has been dominated by the colonising nation-states rather than by the people whose identities are marginalised under occupation. Malik’s work is a welcome and urgent break from India-Pakistan dominant narratives. It is part of a growing conversation around political agency of Kashmiri Muslim women with a nuanced and empirically rich understanding of how different identities—Kashmiri, Muslim, Women—intersect with each other.”

—Dibyesh Anand, *Professor of International Relations, University of Westminster, UK*

“Inshah Malik’s book argues that, far from being victims and bystanders in the conflict in Kashmir, women play crucial—and as yet under-analysed—roles in resistance politics. Malik offers a compelling ethnographic account of their many-faceted contributions to the movement for *azadi*, but also of their challenges to patriarchy locally. This is a book that will enrich all subsequent conversation about Kashmir and the everyday modes of resistance that define lives.”

—Suvir Kaul, *Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania, USA*

“In tenaciously recovering the place of women’s agency in the resistance politics of Kashmir, Inshah Malik tells us an invaluable and until now invisible story, with the emergence of key characters and networks of women-centric political organisations of the past eighty years. In presenting them as conscientious resisters, she also challenges the more familiar, more globalised, view of Muslim women as victims, reinforced the world over by colonialism, orientalism, and the Islamophobia of our present.”

—Sanjay Kak, *Author and Filmmaker, New Delhi, India*

“Scholarly, yet passionately engaged, this study of Kashmiri women in resistance brings to the reader a historical account of the shifts in political activism of Muslim women in Kashmir over seven decades. The study engages with material ranging from interviews and political pamphlets, to activism on social media, offering a rich and nuanced account of the historical agency of women in a long standing struggle against state oppression and militarization.”

—Nivedita Menon, *Professor of Political Theory and Comparative Politics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India*

“Written in an engaging and reflexive style, Malik’s work exemplifies the very best of postcolonial feminist scholarship. The book has immense value for readers seeking a deeper and more nuanced understanding of conflict in Kashmir and across post-colonial South Asia. More broadly, it provides a critical reminder of the need to move beyond conventional feminist frameworks when analyzing women’s political action in movements of resistance, revolution, and liberation.”

—Haley Duschinski, *Professor of Anthropology, University of Ohio, USA*

“Using women’s voices and their memories, as well as their contributions to the struggle for self-determination, this book challenges widely held notions about Kashmiri women’s passivity and victimization. With careful attention to their class and gendered locations, Malik presents Kashmiri women as dynamic and agentive, many of whom rely on Islam for radical social and political reform. A must-read for those interested in understanding the gendered landscape of Kashmir’s resistance movement.”

—Mona Bhan, *Professor of Anthropology, DePauw University, USA*

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Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir
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Dedicated to my Grandmother—Raje.

PREFACE

The city of Srinagar holds on to its grandeur and its natives continue to cling to remnants of an indelible urban pride linked to this ancient city. However, its crumbling mansions and archaic road systems indicate that a violent tussle for power continues to characterise its public life. As cataclysmic violence organised into an armed struggle in 1989, *Pheran*-clad men clutching on to their guns, women with hoarse voices commanding power, and Indian soldiers beating down on civilians became sights I inherited as shattered identity. The public spaces were predominantly organised by the discourses that sought *azadi* [freedom] for Kashmir. In response to this, the Indian state exercised oppressive political control. Making sense of this inheritance was a long and complicated process of learning and unlearning.

While training in social sciences and studying in universities in the Indian cities of Mumbai and New Delhi, I found huge interest in Kashmir's politics among fellow students and colleagues. This crafted a research agenda which finally shaped this work on Kashmir's complicated history and politics. As a response to the interest generated by Kashmir in the student community, I often delivered lectures and presented repressed political views that were otherwise inaccessible to many Indian students. This experience familiarised me with the international dimensions and discourses on Kashmir's politics. I realised that the international scholarship and discourses were limited in their understanding of the political subjection of the Kashmiri people—dispossessing them even further. As a Kashmiri woman scholar, these experiences helped sharpen a critical inquiry about Kashmiri Muslim women and their complicated

political history. The identities of Kashmiri, Muslim and female were not simply used as political categories but investigated thoroughly in the local and global context. Entering the intricate consciousness of Kashmiri Muslim women demanded an unfolding of a forgotten gendered history and an inaccessible repressed Kashmiri nationalist history. The careful excavation of the repressed history of resistance in Kashmir allows for Kashmiri women to emerge as voices offering critical reflections about their political world.

The research involved a deep self-reflexive methodology based on the principle of mutual learning and accessing unexplored oral sources of information. From the beginning, I became aware of the intricacies of the question of identity, self-representation, insider position and the feminist sense of personal-political dynamics. As an insider, the complications of this inquiry were manifold and demanded rearticulating the insider position. Particularly, the fact that such an exploration did not emanate from ethnic ties, religious allegiance or love for the motherland but from the consciousness of sharing bodily vulnerability with a set of people who form the site of this research. This vulnerability, shaped through years of witnessing violence, became a state of genuine epistemological curiosity and helped generate an ethical involvement in probing experiences of victimisation of Kashmiri women. Within the voices of feminist consciousness lays an intellectual and emotional space where bodily vulnerability could be explored as a project of resistance. Such spaces allow for political ideas to transcend their locales and enter the universal debates that concern our collective human life and values. The African-American anti-slavery writer Jacob Harriet, who herself was subjected to the brutalisation of the system of slavery, is an evidence of how lived experience can apprise knowledge without necessarily distorting our values or ideals. She writes:

I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of Free States what slavery really is. Only by experience can anyone realize how deep, and dark and foul is that pit of abominations... —Jacob Harriet

I centre the lived of experiences of Kashmiri women in this book, and as a Kashmiri, I share many of these experiences of living through a military occupation. This involves sharing bodily vulnerability with the site of violence, and body is foundational to the feminist consciousness. The intellectual connections that I have formed with the world of academia through networks of solidarities, informs my world view and many of my

projects. I'm committed to the exercise of knowledge production that deepens our understanding of collective political futures and helps think through lives of women with whom I share such subjectivity. Through both the networks of academia and lived experiences, I wish to illuminate many solidarities and networks I have formed in my intellectual life with ideas about Kashmir that have remained repressed.

This book sticks to certain ethical premises: some names, identities and addresses of homes and workplaces have been kept confidential since these can interfere with the current political work of some women. I have tried my best to ensure that this work does not impact their lives in a negative way by continuing to assure them protection through anonymity. Such a pledge has also meant striking out certain details after the interviewees shared them, once they realised those details could harm them or their political action in future. At times, even publicly active women requested anonymity for unexplained reasons and I have obliged them.

I have dealt with issues of legitimacy and representation by stratifying the women along class, caste and the regional divide. Most of the women interviewed represent the valley-based anti-India movement. Though women were chosen across the regional divide, especially Srinagar, Varmul and Islambad, the movement and its discourses are still dominated by urban political action. In that urban political action, non-Srinagar women are also included. In this exploration, I have not touched upon many political formulations of Kashmiri women and thus through this work, I do not attempt to represent at those wide-ranging political histories or histories of minority women's political action. In the process of the interviews and conversations, I aimed to stick to ethical protocols consistently. These interviews were conducted only after duly explaining the purpose of this research and how the input from the interviewees would be used for research and academic purposes only. Sometimes activists declined consent due to fear or anxiety about sharing politically sensitive information that might endanger their lives and the lives of their families. Some activists during their youthful days were actively involved in the movement but are now married and have families and are concerned about the safety of their children and chose not to give consent to be interviewed. I have respected their need for anonymity. I want to reiterate to the reader that this book is seriously limited in creating a generalised understanding of Muslim or Kashmiri women. It is not an attempt to understand all kinds of possible political formations of Muslim and Kashmiri women, but it tries to put forth an understanding of Muslim Kashmiri

women who choose to represent the movement for freedom from Indian rule in Kashmir. This book should be treated as an important contribution to the wider conversations on Kashmir, Kashmiris and their politics. As deadly violence continues to wreak havoc on ordinary lives in Kashmir, it is also my sincere hope that this book would finally begin a conversation about political Kashmiri women who brave all odds and will restore their foundational role in sustaining everyday political resistance to a military occupation.

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Sincere thanks to my father, who taught me my first lessons about feminism early on in life. I am indebted to my mother and brother Tabish whose comforting and challenging ways always empower me to push my self-imposed limits. I'm grateful to my partner, Seyed Mostafa Ahangarha, whose unwavering belief in my capabilities helps me scale a tough terrain rather swiftly.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Muslim Women, Agency and Resistance

Abstract The chapter offers main arguments and the overall structure of the book.

Keywords Victimisation • Agency • Feminism • Muslim women

An exploration of the lives of women living in conflict zones has often focussed on their experiences of victimisation, therefore giving rise to stereotypical and monolithic discourses on women which singularly label them as victims of war. At the heart of this exploration is a concern for women's rights fuelled by a long history of feminist inquiry. The feminist response to an increase in fatality during war is often a focussed consideration of the oppression of women. Historically, perspectives on women's victimisation during war overlooked the question of women's agency for a long time. The understanding of the lives of women living through war is further skewed in the case of Muslim women. According to Saba Mahmood, global feminism has accommodated caste, class and race, but has demonstrably failed in including religion in its broader conversation.¹ The relationship between feminism and religion is clearly vexed in the case of Islam. Global feminist movements have categorically been hostile to Islam because of the belief that it is exclusively a patriarchal religion. This understanding can be considered as a derivative of the antagonistic relationship between

Islamic societies and the 'West'. The rise of Islamist reaction, particularly its violent strand, after the 9/11 attacks in the United States, further cemented the discourse of Islam's exclusive patriarchy.

In analysing the discourses on the West's 'War on Terror', Lila Abu-Lughod compares the West's need to save Muslim Afghan women from the Taliban to the archaic practice of 'unveiling' of Muslim women by the French in the colonial period. The colonial undercurrent of 'saving' Muslim women is not lost on a keen observer. In the modern context, statist feminism attempts to fixate women to similar colonial ideas. Muslim women are thought of as docile cultural or social icons divorced from politics. Abu-Lughod further explains that presently, such inclinations within feminism have been strengthened by the misrepresentation of Muslim women as permanent victims of Islam and a complete apathy towards their socio-political and historical subjectivity.² Thus, the view that Muslim women are victims of their own religion, is premised firstly on colonialism, then on orientalism, which misrepresents Islam and the Shariah law, and finally on Islamophobia that was perfected further after 9/11 and the rise of Islamist contestation of liberal or secular values.

The subject of Muslim women is complex when viewed in a universal context, which tapers the possibility of interpreting and understating their actions within the feminist theory. Muslim women are often reduced to being subjects of inquiry without being allowed much control over the interpretations of their actions. The complexity of this issue is manifold in the context of postcolonial India and Kashmir.³ A lack of critical understanding of the lives of Muslim women in Kashmir and their place in resistance politics is apparent. Much of the conventional feminist scholarship on Kashmir has merely reproduced the dominant narrative of Muslim women being either voiceless victims, or ideological supporters of men. They are also portrayed as victims, caught between two contesting militaristic patriarchies—whose primary political investment is peacebuilding.⁴ This understanding of Kashmiri Muslim women has further ossified because of the inherent feminist assumption that a recognisable women's agency is the one that resists cultural patriarchy. This assumption might be valid for societies which have a strong private-public division. However, under a pervasive and intrusive military occupation, a public-private division often collapses. Consequently, in such situations women's political action translates into resistance against every day brutalisation and dehumanisation to protect themselves and their families.

Historically, Kashmiri society is a product of an amalgamation of diverse political, spiritual and economic philosophies that made their way into the region through the ancient Silk routes of Central Asia. Geographically, Kashmir was located along important trade routes that gave its social life a fluid identity right from ancient times. Kashmir's distant past is a mosaic of varied influences of the Buddhist-Zoroastrian Kushan Empire, the Sasanian Empire of Persia and the empire of Alexander the Great. The ancient Kashmiri society is also shaped by various Hindu Brahmin and Buddhist empires and their attendant ethos. The transformation from its ancient society to Sufi-Reshi orders in the medieval period—initiated by its encounter with Islam—provides an understanding of the diverse influences on Kashmiri people since antiquity. However, historical narratives about Kashmir are often discussed only in relation to its contemporary South Asian connection.

The vital position that Kashmir holds in the Hindu imagination often forces a nationalistic framework on the scholarly work on Kashmir. Emanating from the experiences of the Partition, postcolonial India's popular political discourse views Kashmir valley's embrace of Islam in the twelfth century as a treacherous moment. In recent times, after 9/11, Islamophobia in the West has offered additional justification for the home-grown historical suspicion of Kashmir's treacherous Muslim identity. The Indian state formulates arguments against the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination by connecting their historical movement to global 'terrorism' as a means to discredit its authenticity. In Hindu nationalist imagination, Kashmir is perpetually a figurative head of a fictitious Hindu goddess—Mother India. This regenerates the Kashmir question in ideological terms, casting it in a Muslim versus Hindu paradigm. Early on, the postcolonial state formation in Kashmir was interrupted by such narratives of distrust emanating through ideological posturing of the Hindu right. For the longest time, Kashmir leftist-secular forces attempted to negotiate autonomy through nursing discourses of rights. However, within modern secular Indian nationalism too, Kashmir was reduced to an inalienable or an integral part of India that further disreputes any local political contest.

The 1989 Islamicate armed uprising consolidated a counter-ideological moment, disrupting the Indian nationalist narratives about Kashmir temporarily. However, these were reasserted by the Indian state by deploying a repressive counterinsurgency network, which has since gained a life of its own. The Indian media narratives portray Kashmiris as terrorists and anti-nationals, obsessed with the 'perverted' ideology of *Jihad*. While the Hindu nationalists claim that the sovereignty of the Indian state is in severe

danger in Kashmir, the Indian leftists and secularists try to invoke the Indian law to hold state sovereignty accountable. However, India's political rule in Kashmir operates through a state of exception. In that exclusive state, politics is both accessible and prohibited for its majority Kashmiri subjects. The dichotomy of that subjection ruptures the Hindu nationalist narrative on Kashmir.

In secular Indian imagination, Kashmiris have lost the right to represent themselves without a reference to the Indian state. It is consistently demanded of their narratives to toe a pro-India line. The sovereignty of the Indian state is held above the rule of law. The system operates in ways that punish its unruly subjects by reserving the exclusive right about when the rule of law shall be applied and when it shall be suspended. Over the years, the systematic absence of the rule of law has been documented by local and international human rights groups. Thousands of recorded cases of human rights violation testify to the lack of justice. The cases of Kunan and Poshpor⁶ mass rape or the Gaew Kadel⁷ massacre remain deliberately not investigated, despite years of activism by local and international organisations. Laws such the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and the Public Safety Act (PSA) have been imposed to ensure impunity to the Indian Army. Thus, in the Indian political culture, a Kashmiri signifies as the one who is in a basic relationship with the state sovereignty, the one to whom the rule of law does not apply and the one whose independent political action is misguided, or is an act of terrorism (OCHR, 2018).

In postcolonial Indian feminist literature, many leading feminist writers have discussed the Kashmir conflict and its impact on Kashmiri women. Ayesha Ray (2009),⁸ notes that feminist writers from India as part of NGOs, or as independent researchers and journalists, have explored the deplorable victimisation of Kashmiri women. The state of victimhood of Kashmiri women is debated extensively in their work. Rita Manchanda (2001),⁹ notes that women have been worst affected in the war over Kashmir. Similarly, Manisha Sobhrajani¹⁰ (2014) notes:

For the women of Kashmir, the impact of this political tragedy has been doubly fatal; they have not just borne the wrath of the conflict, they have also been used as objects of use and amusement, both by militants and Indian security forces... (p. 2)

This detached and distant observation of the lives of Kashmiri women dominated the early feminist work on Kashmir. As Rita Manchanda (1999)¹¹ explains:

They have been killed in crossfire, shot at in public demonstrations, blown up in grenade explosions or in shelling across the Line of Control (LoC) and have been raped by the militants... (p. 1)

Sobhrajani and Manchanda attempt to wish away the label of ‘victimhood’ by trying to locate more agential Kashmiri women through the course of their work, often framing their proactive social roles, or their pro-state political action. Manchanda (2001) explains that during any nationalist movement women’s bodies become the sites of war, as they come to mark the boundaries of an ethnic or a nationalist group. She further explains that the death of men forces women to take up more masculine roles causing a backlash from their community, which puts resistance leadership in a defensive position. In the absence of a male member, women must fend for themselves and their families. In some cases, they also run a risk of being driven out from their in-laws’ homes. While this may be true of any society, Kashmiri society is explicitly seen as a product of its ethnic or religious values.

Seema Kazi, in her book, *Between Democracy and Nation: Gender and Militarization in Kashmir* (2009),¹² refutes the consensus about the functioning of a Kashmiri society and addresses head-on the issue of the daunting militarisation and its impact on the ethnic community, its organisation and its women. Her research clearly shows that an easy comparison between Kashmiri militants and the Indian Army in Kashmir is fraught. This is because militarisation has seeped into the very fabric of Kashmir and affected its social institutions that address the issues of social rights, or duties of women. Additionally, she concluded that the threat to India’s sovereignty was clearly not arising from its neighbours but emanating from Kashmir.

The postcolonial feminist research, barring a few exceptions, remained aloof from understanding Muslim Kashmiri women’s political action in the resistance. In the few cases where this subject is broached, it is done only as an anomaly, or as a pronouncement. The instances of these anomalies are shown as signs of corruption among Kashmiri women. Ayesha Ray (2009) notes:

Muslim women’s groups like the DeM and MKM were fighting to mobilise women in their support, but offering sanctuary to militants—the very same men who were the cause of their (the women’s) suffering in society.

The Muslim women's political action, even when recognised, is seen for its potential to represent ethnic nationalism. The stereotyping of Muslims, Islam and Kashmir has succeeded in keeping the subject of Muslim Kashmiri women's political action largely understudied.

How then can one understand Kashmiri women's political action or their agency, so to speak, with all its complications? Additionally, when agency too is a complex concept. It is generally defined as one's ability to 'act'. The nature, variety or identity of action is central to its philosophical contemplation. Seyla Benhabib (1985)¹³ explains that fundamentally, women are thought of as the 'other'. Therefore, an assertion of self and agency is an important aspect of the feminist theory. Women's agency is understood as their capacity for individualised choice and action, or autonomy to be precise. Feminist writers believe that self-direction and organising are important aspects of autonomy, much as it is understood in moral psychology. They have dealt with the ideas of autonomy with caution, reviewing both Immanuel Kant's and later John Rawl's atomistic notions of autonomy. Their ideas are thought to promote 'masculinist' ideals of personhood, which is sustained by a person's own efforts. No recognition is given to the social influences and, especially, to emotions. Later feminists have sought to reorient the idea of autonomy. Some have argued that the articulation of the conditions and context of choice are important to understand gender oppression and objectification. Reconceptualising the concept of autonomy from a feminist perspective, feminists have tried to make intersubjective experiences a fundamental part of it. This understanding of agency primarily rests on the fact that social norms and interpersonal bonds are assimilated by a human being right after birth and thereafter that person has no control over them. Based on this assumption, it is believed that women are predisposed to accept subordinate positions. However, the later philosophers challenged this notion that the inherent nature of autonomy is masculine. Instead they attempted to reconfigure the idea of autonomy to what is called 'relational autonomy'. Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000)¹⁴ define relational autonomy as follows:

The term relational autonomy as we understand it does not refer to a single unified conception of autonomy but is rather an umbrella term, designating a range of related perspectives. These perspectives are premised on a shared conviction, the conviction that persons are socially embedded and that agents,

entities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by complex intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender and ethnicity. Thus, the focus of relational approach is to analyse the implications of intersubjective and social dimensions of selfhood and identity of the conception of individual autonomy and moral and political agency... (p. 4)

In several feministic criticisms of the idea of autonomy, Mackenzie and Stoljar noted that 'autonomy obsession' is symptomatic of Western culture and such a model is unrealistic for men. This has led to an alignment between autonomy and individualism, while completely promoting the idea of agents as atomistic bearers of rights. However, many feminists would argue that a person's existence is not individualistic but in relation to others. Although people are relational, their characteristics and capacities are constituted and not merely caused in relation to others. Therefore, we accept social relations as an influential component in constituting agents' sense of them and their capacities, without concluding that capacities such as autonomy are non-existent.

More recently, concern has arisen with the way concepts of agency and gender identity are used in the feminist theory. Emanating from the first-wave feminism, the idea of agency and gender identity that are deeply embedded in the traditional male and female roles, do not account for the recent detraditionalisation. Detraditionalisation has its origins in industrialisation and modernity. It has paved the way for gender restructuring that has given rise to new social relations between men and women, including a division of work or labour, which may not be emancipatory in nature for either men or women. Thus, the concern is how the ideas of agency and gender identity can help us understand the new ways of subordination of women, which may not simply arise from patriarchal domination but also from the dominations of class, race and work conditions.¹⁵

The idea that has dominated feminist thinking is that gender identity is not immutable. This has necessitated a rethinking of the agency to acknowledge the intrinsic instability of gender norms. It is also important to acknowledge the possibility of a space that will allow resistance and subversion for emancipatory remodelling of gender identity. According to Judith Butler (1999),¹⁶ gender is not something that is determined at birth, or socially constructed. It is what one does. Like a script that is performed, gender is also done in a mode of belief. The distinctions of personal and political, or private and public are fictitious constructions that preserve structures of power, which are modelled continuously by the society. Therefore, gender identity is not a social imposition as earlier feminists

seemingly thought. It is a mode of 'self-formation' through which subjects become comprehensible. Therefore, an assessment of Kashmiri women's agency in terms of resistance recognises that agency is a complex notion constituted by various identities and performed both as acts of self-formation and in constitutive struggles against oppressive subjection. Kashmiri women's lives are performances scripted by constraints of gender and political occupation. Only through accessing such performances, we can fully assess the question of women's agency.

By tracing an alternative political imagination of the Kashmiri people right from the region's beginning, an attempt is made to break away from the dominant Indian nationalistic framework. This alternative imagination runs parallel to the Indian political imagination, right from colonial times, and has been shaped by various struggles and resistance movements.

This book foregrounds the discussion about this alternative imagination from the British-installed Dogra regime and maps its impact on the self and political formation of the Kashmiri Muslim psyche. Then it traces three different movements in the history of Kashmir through women's political action. The book is organised into five chapters—in the Introduction (Chap. 1), I have set a roadmap for the main arguments and the overall structure of the book.

Chapter 2 begins mapping the origin of the alternative political consciousness and builds a women's history of resistance against the Dogra rule. This forms the pedestal on which the parallel history of women's resistance is traced from the early nineteenth century and followed into the numerous resurgences of the movement after 1947. Historical accounts written about Kashmir have made only a nominal mention of women. This is also true of nationalist histories, in which women are projected as victims of the enemy's wrath. The rejoinders to the history mapping women's contribution in Kashmir focus on elite women with a little reference to all others. The chapter juxtaposes the political agency of elite women of the early Kashmiri nationalist ideology, with the cadre-based ordinary women's accounts of their political action. In the chapter, the early Kashmiri nationalism which was epitomised in the Plebiscite Front movement is also investigated in light of critical narratives of women. These narratives show how class politics deflects the nationalist cause and deflates the theory of Kashmir's accession to India. This was done by indicting the early Kashmiri nationalist leadership of misusing the public sentiment to consolidate an Indian state in Kashmir. These narratives also map the limits of the Indian state's intervention and the fraught nature of early modernity which was formed employing strands of Indian cultural imperialism. The chapter also shows the alternate modes

of political action of cadre-based women and the role memory plays in strengthening the resistance.

Chapter 3 addresses the issue of Islam in Kashmiri politics and dissuades the use of Islamism as a blanket notion to understand Muslim societies. Religious resistance politics is a project of Islamicate modernity in which women created agential positions which culminated in an armed struggle in 1989. Through this book, I try to demonstrate that women's Islamicate political projects were formulated to challenge both the social patriarchy and the Indian state. The Islamicate project was constructed as a response to the debilitating violent atmosphere endangering women's multiple identities. The complexity of the context and the difficulty of the agency are shown through an exploration of women's narratives. Women's political action is historical and contextual in nature and aims at altering the lack of political freedom in the public space. In the 1989 armed struggle, women's activism took a new militant form when it targeted social and traditional gender roles. These Islamicate ideas, along with militant public violence, opened platforms for women to espouse and champion women's rights and emerge as resistance leaders. The narratives of self-construction of Muslim women in the Islamicate politics offer a necessary insight into their self-perception and experiences of their political world. For many women, historical experiences of victimhood offered a political awareness, which was channelled into systematic political action against such victimisation. These women created a network of women-centric political organisations keeping the concern for women's issues at the heart of resistance politics. In the early 1980s, as the Islamicate politics emerged, space was offered to women in male-dominated organisations. However, gradually, in the wake of comprehensive counterinsurgency by the Indian state, women established parallel political authorities. Some of these organisations were routinely supervised by their male counterparts but some preferred to retain their independent decision-making and governing powers.

Chapter 4 discusses how the subjective experience of a military occupation forces women to find alternative expressions of their political opinions without allowing victimising experiences to shape their subjectivity and how they fight for change without accepting their own inferiority. The chapter further unravels the relational agency of young writers, which directly speaks to the feminist notions of liberation. The re-emergence of the resistance movement in 2008 and the ensuing violent state response strongly reinforced many patriarchal beliefs. The public discussion in Kashmir was refocussing on

sexual violence as a war tactic. It was argued that street protests were unsafe for women. Although sexual violence is routinely perpetrated against Kashmiri men too, the bidding was to curtail the supposed extra freedom of women. New strategies of protest emerged because of the violence in the streets. A new generation of Kashmiri women across class, caste and regional barriers, anguished by living through a military occupation, constituted newer terminologies of resistance. They wrote about their experiences by recounting traumatising occurrences in poems and captured evidence of humiliating encounters on film and in photographs. The newly introduced social media became abuzz with these overwhelming new expressions which challenged the Indian state's narrative on Kashmir. I analyse the notions of honour and shame as they are deployed against women, and through women's narratives reconstitute sexual violence as a weapon of war reorienting these traditional notions. Rampant sexual violence or rape came to be understood not as a loss of honour in women but as a punishment for their politics of resistance. Interestingly, women constitute themselves as agents in equal terms because they are persecuted for their political beliefs and actions just like men. This chapter explains how a new generation of Kashmiri women responds to these crimes against women, and articulate a bolder framework through which new discussions about rape as a weapon of war deployed by the Indian state are offered.

By way of conclusion in Chap. 5, I accentuate the fact that Muslim Kashmiri women are not accidental victims but political agents in the struggle for self-determination. They are vehement opponents of patriarchy in its cultural and statist manifestation. Women's context-specific political action shows that a struggle against patriarchy is at the heart of their complex resistance to the Indian state. Even when they engage in an Islamicate politics of resistance, they are participating in a tussle for power (political or social), which is now at the heart of the resistance movement against the Indian state.

This book is based on research undertaken in Srinagar in 2013. A total of thirty women were interviewed, which was a large enough cohort for an ethnographic qualitative analysis. In-depth unstructured interviews were conducted, and participatory observation was employed wherever necessary. These women directly participated as political leaders, community leaders, social workers and writers during different phases of the resistance in Kashmir. They have lived through turbulent phases of Kashmir politics; struggling and fighting against state violence and erasure of their agency by being present and by acting in the best interests of women and their communities. Despite participating in different phases of

resistance politics, they have additionally worked to keep the sentiment for freedom alive. Some women, like Bhaktawar, who was an active political leader in 1989, had later retreated from politics. She has been living on her own in a house which she inherited from her father. In 2010, witnessing police brutality against a young boy in her neighbourhood rekindled her passion for justice. She found herself reasserting her politics that year. Similarly, Fotme's assertion that if Kashmir was freed from Indian control, she would ride a horse through the streets of her neighbourhood shows women's affective investment in a countersovereignty politics of Kashmir.

Under the current circumstances of military occupation, establishing contact with women who have a history of resistance against the state was a challenging experience. The state is in a perennial siege and surveillance is inherent in everyday social culture. The women in Kashmir have developed ways to sustain resistance politics, while mastering the art of survival. Additionally, as a local Kashmiri researcher, access to the field is a complicated and imperilling process. Close contact and communication with the pro-freedom organisations amounted to risking one's life. The political organisations with a pro-freedom stance, such as Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and Muslim Khawateen Markaz (MKM) under the leadership of Anjum Zamarud Habib, shared information about their members and helped in contacting the women protestors who were no longer active in the movement. It is important to mention that with the help of JKLF, I was able to meet a famous ninety-year-old activist, Fotme from Batmalun.

MKM additionally shared information and offered access to the documentation of its history. Liaising in the circles of Kashmiri journalists, lawyers and human rights activists helped me develop a local perspective and cross-analyse the political positions of the interviewees. However, many interviewees, having suffered long-term persecution, chose anonymity after having actively contributed to the movement. The concerns of protection of the family, disillusionment and domination of the movement by petty 'sell-outs' were some of the reasons offered for discontinuing public resistance. Many women suffered long periods of incarceration, physical and mental torture making it impossible for them to continue. Women who actively resist the Indian state still endure jail sentences. They suffer humiliation and social ostracisation, in seclusion, as they are seen as anomalies by the Indian state and rebels in the social context.

NOTES

1. See Mahmoud in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, 2005, p. 1, 'While this question has led to serious attempts at integrating issues of sexual, racial, class, and national difference within feminist theory, questions regarding religious difference have remained relatively unexplored. The vexing relationship between feminism and religion is perhaps most manifest in discussions of Islam. This is due in part to the historically contentious relationship that Islamic societies have had with what has come to be called "the West," but also due to the challenges that contemporary Islamist movements pose to secular-liberal politics of which feminism has been an integral (if critical) part. The suspicion with which many feminists tended to view Islamist movements only intensified in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks launched against the United States, and the immense groundswell of anti-Islamic sentiment that has followed since. If supporters of the Islamist movement were disliked before for their social conservatism and their rejection of liberal values (key among them "women's freedom"), their now almost taken-for-granted association with terrorism has served to further reaffirm their status as agents of a dangerous irrationality.'
2. See Abu-Lughod in 'Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others', 2002, 'I look first at the dangers of reifying culture, apparent in the tendencies to plaster neat cultural icons like the Muslim woman over messy historical and political dynamics.'
3. Kashmir refers to the Kashmir valley of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Area wise Kashmir valley is 15,948 km² and has a population of 6.9 million according to the 2016 census of India.
4. See Urvashi Butalia, *Speaking Peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir*, 2002.
5. The Dogra princely state of Kashmir disputed and divided into three parts under Indian, Pakistani and Chinese control. The line of control stands between Indian- and Pakistani-administered regions. Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas Library Online Catalogue 2003.
6. Kunan and Poshpor are twin villages in the northern district of Kupwar, where, on 23 February 1991, a search operation was initiated by the Indian Army's Rashtriya Rifle Regiment during which more than a hundred women of both the villages were gang-raped by the Indian soldiers.
7. The Gaew Kadal massacre is named after the Gaew Kadal bridge, where, on 21 January 1990, Indian paramilitary troopers opened fire on unarmed people killing at least fifty. According to the survivors, the death toll may have been as high as 280.

8. See Ayesha Ray, *Kashmiri Women and the Politics of Identity*, paper presented at the SHUR Final Conference on Human Rights and Civil Society, LUISS University, Rome, Italy, 4–5 June 2009.
9. See Manchanda, *Women, War and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2001.
10. See Sobhrajani, *The Land I Dream Of: The Story of Kashmir's Women*. New Delhi: Hachette India, 2014, p. 2.
11. See Manchanda, 'Kashmir's Worse-Off Half: Women Are the Silent Sufferers in the War over Kashmir.' *Himal South Asian*, 1999, p. 30.
12. See Seema Kazi, *Between Democracy and Nation: Gender and Militarization in Kashmir*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited (An Association of /kali for Women), 2009.
13. See Seyla Benhabib Benhabib, Seyla, 'The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg Gilligan Controversy and Feminist Theory.' *Praxis International*, 1985: 402–424.
14. See Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspective on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
15. See Lois McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory*. London: Polity Press, 2013.
16. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1999.

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CHAPTER 2

Kashmiri Nationalism: Women, Class and Plebiscite

Abstract The chapter maps the origin of an alternative political consciousness of Kashmiri people and constructs a women's history of political resistance against the Dogra rule of Kashmir. The consciousness allows us a pedestal on which a parallel history of women's resistance since early nineteenth century is placed and after which many of its resurgences in the post-colonial period are traced. The chapter juxtaposes the political agency of elite Kashmiri nationalist, with the cadre-based ordinary women's political action. In the chapter, early Kashmiri nationalism, which was epitomised in the Plebiscite Front movement, is investigated in light of critical narratives of women. These narratives show how class politics deflects the nationalist cause and furthermore deflates the finality of Kashmir's accession to India. This was done by indicting the early Kashmiri nationalist leadership of misusing the public sentiment to consolidate an Indian state in Kashmir. These narratives also map the limits of the Indian state's intervention and fraught nature of early modernity consolidated through espousing Indian cultural imperialism.

Keywords Dogra rule • Plebiscite Front • Class • Kashmiri nationalism
• Accession • Women

What makes the people of Kashmir demand freedom from India? The simmering war over Kashmir has consumed many lives, yet no engagement with the demands of Kashmiri people has been initiated. This question

demands to delve into the local history of Kashmir and bring to attention the movements that have shaped people's political consciousness and sustained a consistent demand for self-determination. This demand, asserted through various people's movements, is older than the formation of both India and Pakistan. Its resurgence underlines the failure of achieving any resolution outside of the repressed political consciousness of the Kashmiri people. Furthermore, the demand for self-determination has not been studied in relation to its constituting influence on the Kashmiri subjectivities and particularly on women. In order to understand the genesis of this demand and its constituting influence on the historical subjectivity, I investigate the people's history of Kashmir and the politics of resistance and collaboration in the early Kashmiri nationalist project. Foregrounding the history of political contest in the postcolonial Kashmir, I trace the resurrection of Kashmiri nationalism and women's role in it. Using non-elite women's narratives about the events of the 1950s Plebiscite Front movement, I attempt to understand the differing motivations, practices and politics of women across class.

While scholars/writers of various nationalities and political ideologies have contributed to understanding the Kashmir issue, the work of Kashmiri scholars has been relegated to anonymity in the international discourse. Furthermore, the historical documents, newspapers and other accounts focus on the male political leaders and male-centric organisations that offer a rudimentary mention of women's contribution to the early resistance history. While male political leaders are chronicled in interminable details, women are occasionally referenced as victims of rape by the Indian Army or alternatively as defenders of the public politics, in the historical accounts written primarily by Kashmiris themselves. Many accounts also chronicle political deaths or victimisation of women only in passing. This chapter reinstates the historical work of Kashmiri scholars and through that unravels the gendered nature of resistance. The local scholarship allows an autonomous and inter-relational women's history to emerge. The rejoinders to the history mapping women's contribution in Kashmir's history focus on elite women with a symbolic reference to non-elite women. This chapter juxtaposes the political agency of elite women of the early Kashmiri nationalist ideology with cadre-based ordinary women's political action. In the chapter, the postcolonial Kashmiri nationalism, which was epitomised in the Plebiscite Front movement, is investigated in light of critical

narratives of women. These narratives show how class politics deflects the nationalist cause and deflates the theory of Kashmir's accession to India. This was done by indicting the early Kashmiri nationalist leadership of misusing the public sentiment to consolidate an Indian state in Kashmir. These narratives also map the limits of the Indian state's intervention and fraught nature of early modernity that embraced Indian cultural imperialism. The chapter also shows the alternate modes of political action of cadre-based women and the role memory plays in strengthening the resistance.

Traditionally, political repression is an everyday experience in Kashmir which is the cornerstone of the present political consciousness. Historically, the persecution and oppression suffered under various systems of governance became a consolidated resistance memory. The memory is carefully handed down as pointers or reflections on the past to the new generation. Through such inheritance of intergenerational trauma, the young are trained in treading the political landscape while avoiding persecution and reformulating an emboldened demand for political rights. In both conscious and unconscious ways, memory is organised, performed and transferred between individuals and groups. I too inherited chronicled political history through oral narratives in the form of *Beaths* (songs) and *Daleels* (stories) from my grandmother. In local culture, folklore and oral narratives have served as a means of education in a hierarchical society where knowledge was generally monopolised by the Brahmin caste and Muslim elites. Folklore offers a broad spectrum of dissident philosophies from early medieval times when Kashmir had its first encounter with Muslim missionaries. Lale Ded's¹ radical social critique of caste and religious bigotry and Habbe Khotoon's² reminiscing about her disappeared King-husband³ has found resonance in women's narratives. The traditions of oral narratives have offered women spaces of social critique without entering public male-centric political spaces. This has historically helped unlettered women to reflect on their own subjectivity. They memorised poems and stories which offered a brief respite from their cumbersome traditional chores and allowed them to become conscious witnesses to several political upheavals. Owing to such traditions, unlettered women continued to participate in modern politics by employing oral history, through which they could develop a parallel sense of authority—as political actors.

ORIGINS OF KASHMIRI NATIONALISM

'Bainame Ambratsar ko tod do,
Kashmir hamara chhod do
Jabri nata tod do
Kashmir hamara chhod do'
[Do away with the treaty of Amritsar
Set our Kashmir free
Break this enforced bond
Set our Kashmir free].
...Slogan used by women during 1930s anti-Dogra Protests

For his collaboration with the British in the Anglo-Sikh War, Gulab Singh, a British loyalist, acquired Kashmir from the British colonialists by signing the Treaty of Amritsar (1846).⁴ Until then Kashmir had been under Sikh rule⁵ and its last governor, Sheikh Imam-ud-din, though not a local, was the only popular representative of Sikh rule in Kashmir.⁶ When the news of the treaty arrived, with the popular support from Kashmiris, Sheikh Imam-ud-din resisted the transfer of power to the Dogras. He convinced Kashmiris about the ominous nature of the treaty and encouraged them to protest against it.⁷ The Dogra King—Gulab Singh—was greeted with a unanimous protest by Kashmiris. Kashmiri scholar Sheikh Showkat Hussain claims that the Dogra army was defeated by Kashmiris near Sheikh Bagh in Srinagar; those who lost their lives were buried in Shaheed Gunj (martyrs beheld), and over time their graves crumbled, though the name of the locality is still in use, as a possible reminder of the historical event.⁸ The Dogra army had to seek British armed intervention to quash this rebellion and Kashmiris were in no position to resist the imperial army. Historian Khalid Bashir Ahmed, while accepting the details of the resistance put forth by Imam-ud-din, warns against the simplistic glorification of his protest. Through exploring historical narratives, he shows Imam-ud-din is a contested figure for his divided loyalties.⁹

Sheikh Imam-ud-din's protests offer a peek into the complexity of Kashmir's local history which contradicts many historical narratives about the British-installed Dogra rule, which throughout its reign was thoroughly challenged by the people. As soon as Gulab Singh resumed power forcibly in Kashmir, his policies of taxation directly impacted *shawlbaafs*¹⁰

(weavers). The artisans began to leave Kashmir in huge numbers in order to evade brutal taxation. On 6 June 1847, thousands of *shawlbaafs* fled Kashmir for Punjab, to escape forcible extortions, heavy land taxation, unfair wage system and compulsory weaving that included child weavers known as the *Begaar* system.¹¹ This caused a terrible loss to the shawl industry, and, as an intervention, Gulab Singh introduced the *Rahdari* policy. Robert Thorp, a British Army official, notes in his book *Kashmir Misgovernment*:

The Taxes on shawls have practically ruined this trade. The people due to high taxes left their fields, and the crops diminished to half, which resulted in a severe famine. The net result has been that the two-thirds of the population perished due to starvation, and many villages in Kashmir were destroyed. (p. 41)

Under this policy, all the major roads out of Kashmir were ordered to be blocked and the weavers were cornered on the highways. To escape the forcible weaving, the weavers were often forced to chop off their thumbs in protest. They continued to live under such oppressive conditions until starvation and famine forced them to organise the first Demand Day on 29 April 1865 against Ranbir Singh (the second Dogra ruler), which broke the uneasy submission into which Kashmiris were forcibly drawn.¹² About twenty-eight people were killed and hundreds of workers suffered injuries. Also, Robert Thorp writes about the protests in following words:

The workers from all parts of the city marched in a procession towards Zaldagar. They raised slogans and burnt an effigy of Pandit Raj Kak Dhar, the Daroga of the Shawl Department. (p. 47)

In 1931 under the third Dogra ruler Pratap Singh, public education system improved through missionary schools and Anjumans (Muslim traditional schools), alleviating illiteracy among the majority Muslim Kashmiris. The Kashmiri masses began to articulate a new national consciousness which expressed itself in a demand for a *mulk* or nation. This immediately emboldened a stringent class politics as Kashmiri Pandits started a parallel Roti (bread) movement that demanded of the Dogra state an inclusion into the administration and more administrative jobs for local Pandits.¹³

MASS PROTESTS AND THE RISE OF WOMEN PROTESTORS

As education levels rose over the next century, the need for a more organised struggle against the Dogra rule intensified. On 21 June 1931, All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference was formed by Molvi Yusuf Shah, Molvi Ahmad, Saeed Hasan Jalali, Saeed-ud-din Shawl, Sheikh Mohamad Abdullah, Ghulam Ahmad Ashai, Mistri Yaqoob Ali, Mufti Shahabudin, Chaudary Ghulam Abbas, Gowhar Rahman, Ghulam Nabi Gilkar and Ahmad Shah Jalali. The organisation sought to give the organic street protests a face and a political representation. The newly educated Muslim elite consolidated a political power through such organising.

Simultaneously, an unknown man became prominent in the street political scene in Kashmir in Khankah-i-Moulla.¹⁴ He pleaded to Kashmiris to rise in a rebellion against the brutal oppression of the Dogra regime. Abdul Qadeer, whose identity remains contested among historians, was the butler of an English Army officer, Major Butt of Yorkshire, who was visiting Kashmir to escape the heat of the Indian plains and resided in the Naseem Bagh area. After Abdul Qadeer had commanded his fellow believers that they must rise against the 'anti-Muslim' and 'oppressive' policies of the Dogras, he was arrested by the Dogra police on 25 June from the houseboat of his employer. He was charged under section 124-A and 153 of Ranbir Penal code. As the news of his arrest spread, people grew concerned for his safety. His trial began on 4th of July and people constantly flocked to the court compounds to witness his trial. On 13 July 1931 in Srinagar Central Jail, about four to five thousand people, both men and women, came to witness the trial. Only about two hundred managed to enter the jail premises and lined up in a peaceful way. As soon as the authorities came in, people raised the slogan 'Abdul Qadeer Zindabad [Long Live Abdul Qadeer]', and demanded his release. The police charged in, to disperse the crowds; this infuriated the people and they fought back. Eventually, a firing was ordered, resulting in the death of twenty-four people including a woman named Mogel. The event marked a serious political turn in public politics while the legal destiny of Qadeer has remained inaccessible. A man of such historical importance has been forced into ambiguity. The fact that there are in place processes of invisibilising independent voices of Kashmiri protest speaks volumes about the historical discrepancies that have plagued discourses around public politics in Kashmir.

This event seriously politicised men and women in Kashmir and motivated them to take part in the political processes even more fervently. A new political culture was shaping up that centralised resistance as a value and promoted resilience in the face of the state repression. The women

participated in the mass agitations political educational drives and established solidarity across areas in Srinagar, Varmul, Sopore, Islambad and Shopian. The spontaneity of protests enabled the masses to carve out a political role for themselves, despite the counter interests of the Muslim elite that was shaping the organisation of mass politics. In this first event of protests, women from lower sections of the society emerged in a unique leadership role without any involvement from the upper-class women. It was only later, during the Quit Kashmir Movement, that elite women joined in to claim a space for themselves.¹⁵ In response to these spontaneous protests, already a reign of terror was imposed under the garb of martial law¹⁶ in Srinagar. However, on 13 July, revolutionary organising of the protests reached unprecedented levels. Women holding their suckling babies stormed into the streets and raised slogans seeking democracy in Kashmir. Shazia Malik in her paper 'Women's resistance against the Dogra rule in Kashmir' notes:

The protesting women were surrounded by the armed police and were ordered to disperse. On their refusal, they were abused, molested, and then killed in large numbers by the agents of the state. Their bodies were recovered from the river in the Srinagar, where they have been dumped by the police. (p. 30)

On 24 September 1931, another Kashmir-wide uprising against the Maharaja began, but this time it was armed. The disciplined display of armed Kashmiri Muslims presented a challenge to the despotic Dogra rulers. Reflecting on this spontaneous armed uprising in *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, P.N. Bazaz notes:

They in spite of their leaders again, proved that the struggle was political and non-communal directed entirely against the administration of the state and was in no manner against non-Muslims. (p. 132)

A class politics had begun to take shape within the Kashmiri political consciousness for posterity and this would play a significant role in Kashmir's political transition after the partition of the Indian subcontinent. On 24 September 1931, the processions of men, often armed, brandishing small weapons, were parading in utmost discipline and displaying their resolve against the state administration. As P.N. Bazaz notes this of class politics that was simultaneously shaping up:

Muslim leaders hurriedly held a meeting at the residence of Saad-ud-din Shawl, one of the representatives from Muslim Conference, and five or six of them applied for an interview with the His Highness, which was granted, they disassociated all the representatives from the gigantic demonstration and explained their position before their august sovereign [Maharaja]. (pp. 132–133)

During these protests spanning several days, women came in their own processions in all districts of Kashmir. During one of such women's processions in the Maisom area of Srinagar, the Dogra forces opened fire on an all-female procession, killing a woman named Fazli on the spot. Sajida Bano, a recently widowed twenty-five-year-old pregnant woman, was also shot dead along with the baby in her womb when Dogra forces opened fire at a crowd at point-blank range in Shopian. In Srinagar, a thirty-five-year-old widow named Jan Begum was shot dead by the Dogra forces and similarly, in Varmul, a woman named Freach from Jalal Sahab colony was killed during police action when she hurled a *Kangir* (a traditional firepot) aiming at a policeman's face.¹⁷ These 'lower-class' women find mention in various histories of Kashmir. P.N. Bazaz, in his book *Daughters of Vitasta*, writes:

One Noor Gujri, a milkman's daughter, plagued the military and police though her vituperative utterance and pugnacious pranks. She was repeatedly arrested, clamped in prison for a few days and released. The National leaders boosted her and denounced the authorities for imprisoning her. (p. 262)

Focussing on such fiercely resilient women who fought the Dogra rulers with wit and determination, Madhvi in her book *Glimpses of Kashmir*, writes:

Jan Ded was illiterate and came from the lower sections in society and this is why her sacrifice has been ignored in the discourse of the freedom struggle in Kashmir. Her natural talents were not exploited, even though she fought well against the injustices. She was [a] pragmatist and was poles apart from many of the male political leaders of Kashmir in that she advocated secularism and shunned narrow communal loyalties. She was ebullient, outspoken and demanding. She incurred [the] wrath of the top Muslim leaders, and had to retire from the active politics after 1934. (192–193)

From its very inception, Kashmiri nationalism was plagued by a class politics where the narratives of top leadership differed from the classes

fighting in the street. The sacrifices of ordinary Kashmiris bolstered the political demands of the elite Muslim leadership. This class politics followed Kashmiri nationalism in its transition from resistance politics to state formation during decolonisation of the Indian subcontinent. The lower-class women, motivated by their need for better political rights, offered their lives for the cause of national freedom, while a trend had been set as a complex relationship between Kashmiri masses and their leaders. The leaders were momentary depictions of Kashmir's countersovereignty and the relationship between the two could be easily interrupted when the demand for that countersovereignty is compromised.

BRITISH EXIT AND DOGRA ENDGAME

There was a gradual reforming influence on Muslim politics after the third king, Pratap Singh, ascended to the throne. The former Dogra kings had cared very little about the British interventions to advocate redressal of political rights of the majority population. By the time Pratap Singh came to reign, two important reports were submitted to him by B.J. Glancy and the Grievances Enquiry Commission.¹⁸ A section of Kashmiri Pandits represented by P.N. Bazaz took keen interest in seeing that these redressals were implemented. Bazaz's meetings with Sheikh Abdullah as recorded in his book *History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, had a major role in the secularisation of the Muslim politics. The Glancy Commission reports were seen as directly pitted against the interests of Kashmiri Pandits and delay in its implementation was heavily resisted by the Muslim Conference. The situation was highly unfavourable to introduce any progressive ideas. Later in 1935, Sheikh Abdullah and P.N. Bazaz found an opportune time to introduce the ideology of progressive nationalism through a weekly journal titled *The Hamdard*. These were the events that eventually led to the conversion of the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference into the National Conference on 11 June 1939. Under the Government of India Act of 1935, provincial autonomy was granted to most of British India and the Indian National Congress could successfully rule for three years before the British exit in 1947. However, a clear trend was emerging in subcontinental politics that the Muslims were not well represented by the Indian National Congress. This immediately had a trickledown effect on the politics in Kashmir. The Muslim Conference would restart, much to the dismay of Sheikh Abdullah, who was himself now facing a situation of choosing whether to align with the Muslim League, which demanded Pakistan, or the Indian National Congress, which demanded a democratic independent India.

THE QUIT KASHMIR MOVEMENT

During the annual session of the secular National Conference held from 3 August 1945 in Sopore, the Naya Kashmir manifesto¹⁹ was adopted. This historic manifesto granted adult women the right to vote and equal rights in all aspects of public life. The modern movement envisioned in the Naya Kashmir manifesto reformed mass politics in Kashmir but with it came Indian cultural imperialism. The brand of modernity that it called for did not transform the local Kashmiri culture but sought to replace it with Indianised modernity. Education drives involved sending children to school in large numbers, often forcibly. The influence of Indian subcontinental cultural politics was manifesting itself in the lives of ordinary women. Raje Begum, in her nineties, recalls the educational drive with a certain zeal as she remembers the slogans that were used to attract young women to brand new Indianised modernity, '*Walve Wesav bismallah kar-tav, tultave yem meakir kasabe, wen aaye sadi yemai wen laegtav*' (Come O sisters, remove these unkempt traditional headgears and adopt these tunics and veils). In this folk song, Indian subcontinental culture (*Sarees and Kamiz Shalwars*) appear as signposts of modernity against which Kashmiri women were to measure their progressive new life. Their central Asian style veils and headgears were no longer welcome in this new modernity shaping Kashmiri public politics.

On 15 May 1946, Sheikh Abdullah launched the Quit Kashmir Movement against the Dogra King Hari Singh after a fiery speech against the legality of the Dogra monarchy. Muslim women from the lower classes were enthusiastically joining the movement, defying the prohibitory orders and gags. Many public meetings were held at Khankah-i-Moulla and Hazratbal, two major Kashmiri religious centres. The Quit Kashmir Movement brought women like Zoone Gojri to the forefront of resistance. Zoone Gojri was a woman who rose to prominence for her militant zeal and was jailed around nine times for her role in the struggle. She was politically mobilised by the death of her twelve-year-old son, who was killed by the Dogra forces. She valiantly fought against the Dogra excesses even though she found no support from her family. Many women slowly began to join the movement. A woman named Fatima was killed by the Dogra forces during the protests. The Quit Kashmir Movement organised the years of simmering demand among Kashmiris. Therefore, its calls were responded to by the Kashmiri people. Many women like Zoone Gojri rose to popularity from the stages of this movement who were later employed for national defence by the Dogra government.

I employ their narratives in understanding the early modern Kashmiri nationalist mobilisations and its appropriation for the Indian nationalist project in Kashmir.

KASHMIR'S UNDECIDED POLITICAL STATUS

In 1947, the Mountbatten Plan determined the political future of the Indian subcontinent, making religion the basis of the division of the Indian subcontinent into new two new countries: India and Pakistan. The princely states were left to carve out their own political future by joining either of the two newly formed countries or by remaining independent. In June 1947, however, Hari Singh was to face a low-profile armed resistance by the Muslims in Poonch, who had resolved to join Kashmir with Pakistan. The king's brutal repression of the Poonchis proved counterproductive. Christopher Snedden in his book, *The Untold Story of the People of Azad Kashmir*, writes:

[T]he reaction of the ruler's predominantly Hindu army to Poonch Muslims' pro-Pakistan activities boosted the anti-Maharaja cause' in Poonch and incited Poonchis to take further action. In response to incidents around Poonch that invariably involved Muslims, the Maharaja's army fired on crowds, burned houses and villages indiscriminately, plundered, arrested people, and imposed local martial law. Indeed, because 'trouble continued ... the State forces were compelled to deal with it with a heavy hand'. Until such oppressive actions, the anti-Maharaja cause probably had little backing. 'Substantial men' told Symonds that 'they would never have joined such a rash enterprise' opposing the Maharaja 'but for the folly of the Dogras who burnt whole villages where only a single family was involved in the revolt'. Such 'folly' motivated some Poonch Muslims to organise a people's resistance movement.²⁰

By September 1947, under the leadership of Muhamad Ibrahim, the rebellion had become a large-scale armed revolt mainly as a response to the Jammu massacre where between 70,000 and 237,000 Muslims had been killed by the Dogra forces. In the Kashmir valley, Sheikh Abdullah who had formerly been jailed for his anti-Dogra activities was released, but he vehemently refused to accept the two-nation theory. A fortnight after the Partition, an organised attack on Kashmir by the people from the north (motivated to avenge the Poonch massacre carried out by Dogra rulers) had begun, and the Maharaja was compelled to rely on and co-opt the Kashmiri

nationalist opposition that he had been repressing since 1931. The ban on all National Conference leaders was lifted and they were promptly released from jails. P.N. Bazaz in his book, *The History of the Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, notes:

Quit Kashmir Movement that was launched in May 1946 had miserably failed in the adventure volunteered to support [the] Maharaja in his anti-democratic and sinister move. While still behind the prison bars and some-time before Mahatma Gandhi came to strike a bargain with [the] Maharaja, Abdullah made suggestions through emissaries to [the] Maharaja assuring him that if the nationalists were released and given some crumbs of personal power they were ready to serve the same Dogra ruler against the rising tide of popular discontent and upsurge whom in 1946 they had asked to Quit Kashmir. (p. 270)

The tribals started entering Kashmir in late October 1946, resulting in a siege in which hundreds of Hindus and Sikhs were killed to avenge the atrocities of the Dogras on Poonch Muslims. In the valley though, the Sheikh's National Conference was taking steps away from this political reality shaping the Muslim politics. He had clearly chosen to side with the Indian National Congress, entered a negotiation with the Dogra King and concretised a classist politics for the Kashmiri masses. The rhetoric of national defence was emboldened by the Dogra state along with its Indian National Congress supporters and the project of progressive Kashmiri nationalism was now suspended amidst the chorus of the unique Indian nationalist propaganda. On the other hand, Pakistan had enforced an economic blockade on Kashmir valley to further pressurise the Dogra regime. Abdullah used the instance to convince the masses that the struggle was indeed for the national defence which demanded an uneasy compromise with the Dogra regime and India.

The National Conference's political accommodation allowed the Dogra government for the first time to involve women in its institutional national defence mechanisms. The Women's Defence Corps, as part of Kashmir's national militia was formed in order to stall the escalating attack on Kashmir. Kashmiri women like Sheikh Abdullah's wife Akbar Jehan, Mehmooda Ahmad Ali Shah, Sajjida Zameer and Krishna Misri became the prominent leaders in the Women's Defence Corps. All these upper-class women received education from missionary schools and their experiences

in politics differed hugely from the struggling masses of unschooled Kashmiri women. Akbar Jehan was daughter of the British hotelier Michael Harry Nedou, the eldest son of the European owner of an Indian hotel chain and his Kashmiri wife, Mirjan. Akbar Jehan's entry into Kashmir politics was based on her gendered role as wife of the first prime minister of Kashmir and subsequently mother of Farooq Abdullah. Mehmooda Ali Shah was a daughter of a forest range officer. Syed Ahmed Ali Shah who world with the Dogra government. She was the first Muslim woman in Jammu and Kashmir to pass the tenth standard and became a dedicated educationist. She was close to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the chief minister G.M. Sadiq. Sajida Zameer Ahmad rose to prominence during her activism in the Quit Kashmir Movement towards its end. Many of these women entered politics by way of being the forerunners of the modernity project in Kashmir which emphasised education, progress and social emancipation, which were deeply entrenched with subcontinental Indian cultural imperialism. Other women entered the project clearly because they were relatives of the early Kashmiri nationalists.²¹

Akbar Jehan, the wife of Sheikh Abdullah, became actively involved in politics after Sheikh Abdullah was arrested for organising the Quit Kashmir Movement in 1946. She took charge and led the anti-Dogra protests. She actively helped the persecuted Kashmiri people by raising money and collecting donations. Mehmooda Ahmad Ali Shah was a student in Lahore in her early days where she joined Punjab student's federation fighting against British rule. She started the 'Free Thinkers Society' in the hope of instilling new ideas into the Kashmiri movement against Dogra rule. Sajida Zameer Ahmad affiliated herself with the Quit Kashmir Movement in its latter stages. During the activism necessitated by the tribal incursions, women were given instruction in the use of arms and trained as nurses to attend to the wounded and sick in times of violence. While commenting on her role in the Women's Self-Defence Corp (WSDC), Krishna Misri, in an interview with Andrew Whitehead, notes,

For the first time, a militia of women was raised on the subcontinent. Ironically, Kashmiri women took to arms when entry into the armed forces of state was statutorily forbidden to their men in the Dogra regime.

Zoone Gojri was an uneducated Kashmiri woman who joined the Women's defence corps and received arms training. For her role in the WSDC she was awarded the title of Zoone Mujahid. The incidence of

Zoone's participation in the WSDC was used as a poster icon granting legitimacy to the Indianised modernity project. Krishna Misra describes Zoone in the following words:

Attired in traditional Kashmiri clothes and carrying a gun around her shoulders, Zoon Gujjari symbolized the WSDC. A milk vendor's charismatic daughter, hailing from a conservative Muslim family that lived in downtown Srinagar she received well deserved media coverage. (pp. 116–117)

In the absence of a narrative from Zoone Gojri about her participation, her iconic images are left to political interpretations by the elite political women. It was the very Dogra State that women like Zoone Gojri had fought—which now included her along with a group of elite women in the 'noble' cause of national defence, while Kashmiri men were strictly prohibited from receiving any such arms training. The legacy of non-elite women in the anti-Dogra movements and their momentary participation in WSDC has been reduced to a mere footnote by most historians. The complexities of class and caste politics are left unexplored and often only mentioned to constitute an Indian nationalist project in Kashmir. The early Kashmiri nationalists garnered support of ordinary women only in their promise for self-determination—a question which was at times deployed and at other times ignored by the National Conference's politics of accommodation. The armed WSDC women were never deployed for warfare, which points to the fact that the women's emancipation project served more as an exercise for strategic Indian national interest. An exercise of consolidated politics around women's rights as a foundational question of war, in line with colonial practices of saving 'Muslim' women from the depreciated conservative forces of religion alone.

The princely states of British India were given an option under the Indian Independence Act of 18 July 1947 to accede either to India or Pakistan. From the beginning, the National Conference's stance remained pro-India, albeit with the condition that a referendum was to be held and directed by the United Nations resolutions of 1948. The Sheikh Abdullah, from time to time in his speeches, referred to the special conditions under which his state had joined India and considered accession would be final only after a genuine referendum. The Dogra ruler acceded to India for three matters only, external affairs, defence and communication. The formation of the Constituent Assembly in 1950 led to the Sheikh resuming power. The accession was finalised by the Dogra king, even though there was a considerable level of contestation from within Kashmir, and the focus of the struggle was shifted towards gaining greater autonomy.

Article 370 of the Indian constitution provided a special provision for the accession of Jammu and Kashmir state to India. The Hindu right-wing forces, especially Jan Sangh, opposed Article 370 and vehemently criticised. The Sheikh for hatching conspiracies to join the state with Pakistan. This polarising experience soon put the Sheikh in a defensive position and the demand for a referendum (as ordered by the United Nations)²² galvanised. It led to the split within the National Conference; on the one hand Bakshi Ghulam Mahmad upheld accession to India as final, and on the other hand the Sheikh and his strong supporters, such as Mirza Afzal Beg and Sofi Mahmad Akbar, maintained accession would be final only after the referendum was held. The view that accession wasn't genuine because it was forced upon the Kashmiri ruler under the situation of a 'tribal' threat became robust, and in response Nehru, in particular, made the promise of plebiscite to the Sheikh and the people of Kashmir.

The Dogra ruler sought military assistance from India, to push back on the tribal incursions and the Indian Army arrived in Srinagar on 27 October 1948. The resulting war between the Indian forces and tribal militia resulted in an active Line of Control and ultimately the formation of Pakistani-administered Kashmir. The Kashmir case was taken to the United Nations, which in turn upheld the promise of the referendum to the people of Kashmir, as mentioned in the Treaty of Accession. The United Nations military observers arrived on 24 January 1949 with their mandate to supervise the ceasefire between India and Pakistan until the recommended plebiscite could be held. Kashmir was divided into two administrative territories—Jammu and Kashmir under India and Azad Kashmir under Pakistan. Sheikh Abdullah, the popular Muslim leader, was assured that his cry for the right for self-determination would be heard through the state-mandated Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly.²³

In the Interim Government, Sheikh Abdullah became first prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir materialising the promise of autonomy for Kashmiris under the newly formed state of India. The idea of plebiscite is one of the foundational concepts of Kashmiri politics to this day and it has been deeply rooted in Kashmir's resistance politics since early times. As Gockhami notes in his book, *Politics of Plebiscite*,²⁴ the idea was first introduced in the state in the 1945 Sopore convention of the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference. This was an important conference that put forth many important demands, including state elections with adult franchise, also setting out the resolution demanding the right for self-determination for all nationalities in India. The National Conference disagreed with the idea of the Partition, terming the ideology behind the idea of Pakistan as reactionary and found itself closer to the secular ideology of

the Indian National Congress. In case of a choice of accession with either India or Pakistan, the members reasoned that a democratic system in India would respect Kashmiri demand for self-determination. Sheikh Abdullah and his party crushed any opposition that was raised by the groups that favoured an accession with Pakistan. The Sheikh often in his speeches mocked the two-nation theory, arguing that it was communal and against the very foundations and principles of Islam.

On many occasions during his reign, the Sheikh started to turn to the United States for Kashmir's independence. It was his deep-rooted idea of an independent Kashmir that made the Sheikh critical of India in the long term. In particular, it was his Ranbirsinghpura speech in Jammu that led to trouble between Kashmir and the Indian state. In 1953, he reminded people that in 1947 he had strongly pleaded for freedom before accession and three of his cabinet ministers had turned against him, including Bakshi Ghulam Mahmad, who became prime minister while Sheikh was incarcerated. As the Sheikh began to proactively use the state assembly for his provocative referendum politics, New Delhi saw his moves as threatening and a coup was orchestrated by the Indian central government on 9 August 1953, leading to his twenty-year-long incarceration, and thus began the corrosion of the little autonomy granted to Kashmir. Especially after Sheikh Abdullah's incarceration, the validity of the politics of Kashmiri nationalists was to be ascertained by their policies to defend a demand for a referendum which was invoked for time to time. Gockhami notes, Sheikh Abdullah expressed in *the weekly periodical, Awami Daur*, Jammu, on 2 October 1978, that:

It was due to my basic difference with government of India that I was detained on Aug 9, 1953. The differences started sometimes earlier and GOI [Government of India] wanted to go back on all its promises that it held to people of Kashmir...

On 9 August 1953, Sheikh Mohamad Abdullah was arrested and removed from his prime ministership, in a case filed against him by the Government of Kashmir and the investigations department of the Government of India, which came to be known as the Kashmir Conspiracy Case. He and his aides were accused of secretly conspiring against the Indian State. This event saw huge protests from his supporters and large numbers of people were killed in police action. Gholam Mahmad Bakhshi's

regime was installed and he resumed power as the new prime minister of the state. The Bakhshi regime is remembered by ordinary people as one of corruption and rapid political Indianisation of Kashmir. His regime strengthened Indian central control and gradually set in motion the process of the ultimate erosion of Kashmir's autonomy.

RESURRECTION OF A MILITANT KASHMIRI NATIONALISM

The failure to utilise the Constituent Assembly to deliberate on public issues, specifically the question of 'right to self-determination', made young people rethink its purpose. The alternative spaces were reclaimed to begin discussions about the failure of the National Conference in delivering the promise of freedom. A popular resistance culture was shaping up and exploring methodologies for reaching to the political objective of national self-determination. Sheikh Abdullah's unfair removal from power and incarceration raised caution in the public culture about the limits of India's 'democracy' project in Kashmir, even though much of the opposition already emphasised the disputed nature of 'accession'. Rao Farman Ali, in his book *The History of Armed Struggles in Kashmir*, notes that the first militant outfit in a 'post-disputed-accession' Kashmir, called Mujahid Home Front, had been functional since 16 October 1948. He further notes that the group declared the 'Instrument of Accession' was invalid because the King was unauthorised for executing it as he was not an elected public representative. The group was openly critical of the National Conference's resolution in support of accession.

After the coup, a section of National Conference leaders began to discern between Indian rhetoric and actual Indian policy on Kashmir. Suddenly, now out of power, a call for a plebiscite was again raised by National Conference leaders. Sheikh Abdullah's arrest was protested against by the masses and as a result scores were killed in unprecedented police firing. The Bakshi regime strengthened Indian central control on Kashmir's political life. Gradually, the process of eroding Kashmir's autonomy began to take shape.

As Sheikh Abdullah languished in jail, the eleven-year-old Bakhshi administration had changed the moral and political composition of Kashmiri society. While from the Indian point of view, it created 'development',

‘progress’ and much longed-for stability, from the Kashmiri point of view, the regime let loose a corrupt political order and divisive methods to pitch people against one another. The only notion that still held sway over people was the demand for a referendum and thus only by strengthening this demand could the National Conference regain legitimacy. The Nationalists resolved to formally take up the demand for a referendum. Mirza Afzal Beg, Sheikh Abdullah’s close confidant, resolved to initiate Mahaz e Rai Shomari [Plebiscite Front] on 9 August 1955. The front worked tirelessly to acquaint the common people about the disputed nature of accession. The front had several stalwart leaders as its members, among them Sofi Mohamad Akbar, Attaulla Soharwardy, Munshi Ishaq, Dr. Abdul Majid Shaikh, Gholam Mahideen Shaikh, Gholam Mohamad Baderwahi and Akbar Jehan.

On the sidelines of the political gymnastics that the Kashmiri nationalists had to perform to bring the Indian state’s ‘promise’ of democracy to fruition, several armed groups began to mushroom in Kashmir. They had little or no trust in this ‘promise’ and had resolved that only an armed struggle could help achieve the goal of freedom. The disregard for the Kashmiri right to self-determination was symptomatic of a forceful acquisition of Kashmir by India. Two armed groups—Young Men’s League and Al-Fatah—consequently began their operations on nationalist liberation lines against India. In the hope of gaining and maintaining power, the National Conference followed dual policies, one for the Indian state and one for the Kashmiri people, and acted mostly as the chief arbitrator between the two. They were acutely aware of the dynamics of class in Kashmir. Reflecting on the relationship between the new armed groups and Kashmiri nationalists. Rao Farman Ali presents the following anecdote in his book:

It was probably October 1965, when some students of Degree College Anantnag met with Mirza Afzal Beigh at water tank Sarnal, namely Abdul Rashid Dar, Qasim Sajad, Ghulam Mohi-Ud-Din Malik besides several others and discussed about Kashmir, Dar said to Beigh that they should start a struggle like Algeria but vehemently opposed by PF [Plebiscite Front], President saying “Large scale armed struggle in Kashmir will invite a class war and will serve the interests of others than Kashmiris”. (p. 74)

This militant reassertion of the Kashmiri right to self-determination built a pressure on the Plebiscite Front to keep in check its politics of self-determination and thereby its representation of Kashmiri demand for freedom.

WOMEN IN THE PLEBISCITE FRONT PROTESTS

*Rai-shomeri barekh dobas**Aalve babas mobarakh*

The demand for Plebiscite is annulled

Congratulations to our worthless leader [Sheikh Abdullah]

The above slogan was used in the protests against Sheikh Abdullah's signing of the Indira-Sheikh accord in 1975. The slogan captures the disillusionment of Kashmiri activists of an early Kashmiri nationalist mobilisation and presents Sheikh Abdullah 'the lion of Kashmir' (as he is venerated in the popular discourses), but also as a 'disappointment', embodying a certain death of a political desire. Formerly, he had encouraged self-reliance and resistance against economic dependence on India in many instances during his speeches, particularly emphasising the consumption of home-grown potatoes as against imported Indian rice. Thus, in the slogan Aalve Bab (literally 'Potato Father') insinuates the Sheikh's failure on certain promises made to the people of Kashmir. The slogan captures the most crucial aspect of Kashmiri political life as it relates to the critical relationship between the people and their leader. It successfully dislodges the previously held orientalist view of Kashmiris—only as a faceless mass operating in an ideologically charged atmosphere. Kashmiri political life emerged and functioned through the tenacious link between people, promises and leaders. Thus, the project of early modern Kashmiri nationalism manifested itself within a complex web of political realities. The Indian attempt to co-opt that political consciousness began to rupture and could be seen in the political processes of 1950s. An era that remains shrouded in mystery and is forcefully made elusive under aggressive Indian nationalist posturing, comes alive in the narratives of Kashmiri women emerging through memory-keeping practices. And these narratives, much like the slogan, unsettle any ground upon which the analysis of the history of the Kashmiri politics can be rested. The era of the 1950s was of special significance for women, as new ideas of modernity were producing gripping discussions. Under Sheikh Abdullah's prime ministership, several radical policies were introduced. The Zaldar (landholders) system of the Dogra era was immediately abolished through the 'Land to Tillers' Act. The Zaldars who owned all the agrarian land were overnight turned into commoners, in order to bring about radical material equality among the people. The move changed the social landscape of Kashmir forever.

The incarceration of Sheikh Abdullah in 1953 naturally put his wife Akbar Jehan at the intersection of the political movement and domestic life. Suddenly, she became a persistent link between the leader and the movement. Her role in the Plebiscite Front was necessitated both by the political conditions engulfing her life, and by her own will to engage and step up to the role that history was carving out for her. Her previous experience in the Quit Kashmir Movement against the Dogras had also predisposed her to live under autocratic conditions. Sheikh Abdullah's incarceration created room for her to retake that position as an exceptionally capable leader.

Akbar Jehan's status as a wife of the prime minister was a special one. She was referred to as *Madar e Meherban* (Kind mother) by the ordinary people who visited her for counsel. The prime minister's ousting and incarceration stripped her of the powerful position she enjoyed. As the Bakshi regime was established, everyday curbs on dissent started to refashion public politics. The regime was particularly hard on Sheikh Abdullah and his followers. In Nyla Ali Khan's biographical work on Akbar Jehan,²⁵ *The Life of a Kashmiri Woman*, her grandmother is portrayed as a woman struggling to keep her life together in the face of a calamity. Akbar Jehan embodies a militant zeal in her political work while being a mother. She lives in a house offered to her by Sheikh Abdullah's close friend and struggles to keep her children at school while also being one of the important members of the political movement started by the Plebiscite Front. Nyla Ali Khan painstakingly presents details of the complex self-consciousness of her political activist grandmother. She allows us to understand Akbar Jehan's religious consciousness and politics that constituted her moral stances against the Bakhshi reign. She mentions Akbar Jehan's refusal to take the allowance allotted to her by the Bakshi government as an instance of her courageous resilience. Akbar Jehan's heroic role opened the way for other women to enter the public political sphere. Her leadership encouraged other Plebiscite Front members to gradually involve their own mothers, sisters and wives in the movement. These women from upper classes/castes were introduced to newer ideas of self-determination, equality and rights. These modern concepts enabled women to think on different trajectories of self-actualisation and often their struggles played out very differently from the likes of Akbar Jehan.

The Plebiscite Front's focus was to educate the people on the necessity for demanding a referendum. The leaders established a legal cell within the

state high court premises to be able to defend the incarcerated members of the movement. The circumstances of fear unleashed by the Bakshi era consolidated into his effort to organise militias of ruffians called the 'Peace Brigade' whose job was to keep tabs on the activities of Plebiscite Front activists and intimidate them. These modern ideas of self-determination charged ordinary people with a new zeal. They passionately argued for their rights even though a large number of people were still unlettered, living destitute and impoverished lives.

Therefore, the movement was hierarchical and the notions of rights were percolating from the top leadership to the women at the bottom. In one incident, when Mirza Afzal Beig was released from jail, a sea of women waited for him. Singing paeans and jubilant, they took him to the Assembly. Such incidents testified that women's passion for these ideas was high, remembers Nazir Ahmed. A political commentator, Nazir Ahmed's father, was a member of the Plebiscite Front, and he reflects on women's role in the movement:

There was also another section of women who had contributed in a significant but concealed way—wives, daughters and mothers of the Front's male members. Their jobs were to make posters and pamphlets for distribution and awareness. Many women were arrested, jailed and long-term cases were registered against them, and despite the stigma it brought to women in a traditional society. Women also formed the cadres for phenomenal street level activism. Certain areas mostly of main downtown Srinagar became fundamental focal points for women's activism.²⁶

In the Maisom area, the Plebiscite Front had a key member named Raje. She was a community leader with expertise in organising women's street protests as and when the front needed. She had a vernacular eloquence and a skill to convince ordinary women about the rationale of the movement which attracted women like moths to a flame. Another leader, Zaine, rose to popularity during plebiscite protests, and later formally joined the National Conference as a community leader. The leaders held considerable sway over the women of their respective localities and sprung into swift action. The Plebiscite Front leaders were acutely aware of the gendered context in which women of 'lower' classes operated and were willing to use such a context for a nationalist cause. Nazir Ahmed reflects on the political use of women for protests:

In a traditional “honour” and “shame” society such as Kashmir, in public spaces men are forced to respect women. As a result, it was more favourable to send women to defy curfews and bans, in case a police action ensued, it would be too violent for men. Thus, uneducated women supported the front and helped the movement in such extreme situations.²⁷

The reference to the category of ‘uneducated’ women is a rather problematic one. It exposes the colonial nature of education in the early Kashmiri nationalism project. Since women engaged in political acts that made them master writers of their own political actions, they were well-versed in folk cultures and able to make a choice for themselves. However, for the front leadership they were merely a ‘mass’ of women who were to be employed strategically for a national cause.

Regardless of how the nationalist leadership saw their contribution of a certain strategic value, women who participated in the movement were hardly ever blind to such hierarchies. On the contrary, many women took to these roles wholeheartedly, prioritising national good over personal good. They believed in the cause and saw their own cause to be deeply connected with the political situation of their country. I met two women, Fotme and Zaine, who were very active community leaders during the Plebiscite Front movement and afterwards. Fotme is almost ninety years old and lives in a small two-room house with her daughter. Zaine is well-known activist of the Plebiscite movement who was affiliated with several other groups active in this period. Both Fotme and Zaine hail from the Maisom area, a bastion for the sentiment of Kashmiri nationalism. However, it is claimed that Maisom is a female-dominated area of Srinagar. Historically, there was a strong trend for women of this area to marry rural men and bring them to live in their homes. The practice of role reversal is predominant and, hence, Maisom is a matriarchal stronghold of Srinagar city. Perhaps such claims are rooted in the history of political activism of women like Fotme and Zaine, who attempted to challenge gendered notions through participation in political work, which was not accessible to upper-class women. Through Fotme and Zaine, one comes face to face with the subversive potential of notions of gender and national liberation.

When Fotme was young, she enthusiastically joined the spontaneous protests in her locality. Through such attendance, she partook in a politics that was both new and refreshing. It was a promise of change and of freedom that made her an ardent supporter of Sheikh Abdullah. Even

to this day, she remembers him as a representative of a political cause of freedom, not mindful of the topsy-turvy methods he employed in his political career. Engaging directly with much of the story of the movement, she has memorised songs and slogans with definitive reflection on her role as a community leader. She thinks of herself as a dedicated political activist with upright morals who spent her whole life on a cause that is dear to her. She reflects with the following on her role in the movement:

To this day, they have my photos in Mujahid Manzil [National Conference Office] clicked while I was protesting in several places against the illegal rule of India. I have served numerous jail terms and witnessed instances of police brutality.²⁸

She juxtaposes her heroism with the treatment meted out to her as a woman in the movement. She thinks women are only involved to embolden the war cries and soon after forgotten. Unlike elite women who had circles of supportive networks, Fotme received no monetary help and she found herself all alone when hardship struck home. She is visibly frustrated about how little women like her could influence decision-making processes, or reflect on the directions the movement should take. And yet it is people like her who made the movement. They contributed selflessly but a very different set of people achieved power and then successfully sidelined her. She continuously uses the National Conference and its policy towards people like her as an example of women's exploitation and backtracking from the cause of freedom.

The situation in Kashmir has become such that people's politics and political opinion has become a commodity. It is bought and sold for a price, she argues. In her opinion, one does not buy a political opinion; it is something we create from our own moral and political conviction. For her it is a persistent question, 'how do the entitled political parties or powerful factions pay money to their supporters'? In her lifetime, different political parties have approached her with offers of money and luxury, in the hope that she will turn on her stance for freedom, and her followers will eventually join their constituency. She proudly declares, 'I have rejected them all, no matter from which political lobby they approached me'.

Fotme's motivations were shaped by her everyday struggles in witnessing corruption, oppression and high-handedness. This is what motivated her in her battle for freedom. As she states, 'such a consciousness cannot

be created with money or favours'. She is proud that she sided with a demand which was just under brutal political conditions in her country. She used to put together money from her small budget, cutting down her bills on food, clothes and other items. She would spend that money on her political work. In groups, women would come together and collect small amounts of money to be able to travel further to other areas, and educate people about the need for political freedom and the right to self-determination. She relates an incident to further show her conviction and agency, which is foundational to her politics:

The only time I went to the National Conference office was a few years ago. I'm already old and I have just one daughter and no one else. She is a doctor and was transferred to work in some far away village. She takes care of me. I wanted her to be posted close-by. Against my own conviction, I decided to seek help from the National Conference office, but they simply ignored me. The same people, for whom during the Plebiscite Front movement, I was an important leader!²⁹

In 1953, Fotme was at the forefront of the protest when police charged in on women protestors. A police woman asked her why she was protesting. Fotme replied that they wanted end of Indian rule of their country and a vote on their right to freedom. As soon as she finished her sentence, the police woman called in her constabulary and had her and other prominent leaders arrested. They were taken to Kochebar police station. After a few days, Fotme was visited by her daughter. She remembers vividly that her daughter tried to console her but she responded with strength. She was not scared of anything because she was raising a just demand and it had to be raised without being afraid. At the age of ninety, she still has a resolute political stand. And all that she has endured in her life has been to keep that political position just as she had promised Sheikh Abdullah in 1953.

Fotme reasoned that her support for the freedom of Kashmir and the demand for the right to self-determination came from her understanding of the history of communal tensions in India and Pakistan. She is still an avid reader, having taught herself to read by looking at newspapers. Through newspapers, she came to understand the political situation in India and Pakistan. She early on that India had no intention of granting Kashmiris their rights, but she was also convinced Pakistan was

not an ‘ideal’ Muslim homeland. She regularly read about communal violence, instability created due to military interference and oppression against minorities in Pakistan. To her, all of these facts were contradictory to the idea of Islam. This understanding and realisation brought her to the conclusion that it was better for Kashmir to be a poor country with fewer weapons than to be part of either of these ‘blood-thirsty’ nations. She laments:

Identity politics was not going to resolve our problem. It was going to further divide us into factions and pieces in the face of enemy nations.³⁰

This is what shaped the basic political consciousness of women in the Plebiscite Front and people like Fotme have, through different ways, kept the light of such political ideas shining. With what they stood for in 1953, and over several periods of political transformation, they have become more certain that there is no other resolution for Kashmir than to demand the absolute right to freedom for its people. She is unwilling to accept the commonly purported idea that Pakistan has helped the Kashmir cause globally. She argues Pakistan has interests in Kashmir just like India and they have done everything to strengthen lobbies that support them here. If Pakistan cared about Kashmiri freedom, it would have invested in the lives of actual freedom fighters. They would have activated their networks to help people who have given sacrifices in blood. They (Pakistan) in fact helped to install a state of anarchy where everyone was after power, position and wealth. She further pontificates that:

If we believe India has no right to control our land, only by resisting against this continued occupation can we live functional political lives. Who is dividing the people of Kashmir when some say Hindustan Zindabad and some say Pakistan Zindabad? Who has created this relationship of dependence? We, as Kashmiri people, need to rethink our politics and who are its beneficiaries? We cannot allow this faulty thinking to continue dominating our politics. In 1953, I promised Mujahid Manzil that I will be steadfast with my cause, not in hope to gain personal benefits but for freedom of all people. Today’s generation must learn these skills of resistance and not get lured by money and opportunity. It is our right to be free just as we respect the rights of Indians or Pakistanis to be free. I’m old and frail now but if the day of freedom is announced, I will ride a horse in the streets out of joy.³¹

Zaine was a teenager during the Plebiscite era but she remembers the events with graphic detail. She enthusiastically joined all the protests and speeches by Sheikh Abdullah. He was a towering leader who spoke for the rights of the downtrodden and Zaine identified with his ideas the most. She rose to the occasion, to become a leader at a young age and received directions from Begum Abdullah herself.

She used to raise slogans, march and engage in heated battles with opponents and was unafraid to pelt stones in pitched battles with the police. She held consultations and meetings with the front's top women leaders regularly and then worked in organising conferences addressing issues of concern to the ordinary people. Unlike the popular notion that the situation in Kashmir turned violent only after the 1989 armed struggle, Zaine witnessed police repression, jail terms and violence on a regular basis in Kashmir in the 1950s and 1960s. Reiterating the point of politics of pushing women to the frontlines, Zaine reminisces:

The political situation left men more vulnerable and somehow women more empowered, many a times we asked our men to stay indoors while we went out to protest against the state administration and police forces.³²

The spirit of the times was community-oriented. Eventually, due to activism and widespread political education, everyone in the locality took part in the movement. Men and women, young and old together, thronged the streets to join the protests demanding the Sheikh's release, and the right to self-determination. Sometimes, women would face curbs from families for going into street protests, but they would resist such pressures and make sure they joined these processions. After Zaine got married, her husband wanted her to stop her political activities but in her own words 'he failed to stop me'. Eventually, after the 1980s, political events changed the atmosphere; women like Zaine felt it was dangerous to be part of such a political atmosphere.

When Sheikh Abdullah was released, he did a particular somersault on his political promises. It was no longer safe for Zaine to associate with such politics. She had to formally retire as now corruption, failed promises and oppression had filled people in her community with anger. She had lost her justifications for publicly defending the Sheikh's politics and her retirement offered her recourse from the heartbreak that his supporters experienced. From this situation, she recalls:

Sheikh Abdullah's struggle was for our collective dignity and future but after incarceration and putting everyone's contribution at stake, he chose to sell us. We had put all our trust in him. But after he accepted to be the Chief Minister, how could I support him? It was a cruel fact that he accepted the occupation of our lives by the Indian Army and allowed himself and his family to do this to the people who served his cause with blood and toil.³³

Zaine argues that their struggle for freedom was not going to be an easy one and only the one who has such consciousness should enter the movement. Only such an understanding of what we struggle for will help us achieve our goal. Zaine defines the idea of *azadi* (freedom) in the following words:

To us *azadi* means to be in control of our lives, to have a right to decide how to live and in what kind of a society. We are forcefully made dependent on India for small and big things. We want to end this dependence; we want to be able to produce in ways we wish. All people have contributed to this struggle and people should remember that so have women. Women have lost their lives, their sons, their families and honour; only complete freedom can help them end the state of prolonged victimization. Beyond wanting this goal, we also want and support all people's right to be free and for that we have given sacrifices in different ways.³⁴

Zaine believes that the reason women were eventually pushed to the margins in the movement is related to the corruption and dishonesty in the movement's leadership. When politics is ethical and principled, more women feel at ease to enter and participate in it, but when a movement is corrupted, it becomes difficult to survive in it.

Zaine also witnessed the 1989 struggle and came to know many of its leaders like Yasin Malik and Shabir Shah at close quarters. Initially, for her political reputation, she felt obliged to help the movement in the early stages but within a year witnessed it fall into disarray. Kashmiri society changed, with some poor people becoming rich overnight. Mansions sprang up, while thousands were massacred in cold blood. The class divide became broader and the sentiment for freedom began to be clubbed with the 'disadvantaged' people. Newer terminologies, upper town and down-town began to make the politics of freedom obsolete. A strong collaborator class came into the picture that actively assisted India's occupation of Kashmir. This occupation is not just political but also cultural. Pakistan also invested into its own strategic class which established an ideological hold on mass politics.

For women like Zaine, it is important to protect their position for which they have served jail terms for charges of conspiracy against the state. They have witnessed Bakhshi's regime that has been equally, if not more repressive, and have kept their ideas and thoughts alive and transferred them to the next generation. The political position that Fotme and Zaine took and firmly maintained allows us to take a peek into the times before the 1980s and, as a result, turns them into unusual witnesses who help us understand the perspective of 'untaught' women's political actions.

The work of women in the struggle of the Plebiscite Front is gendered in different ways. Women's class has been a determining factor in the struggle against gendered roles. Zaine thought of her role in the movement not as a right but as a duty. In the possibility that public politics can be a duty for a woman, she complicates patriarchy in a unique manner. She equalises a political role as ordained to women to be similar to that of a man. In this, she wins a public battle for space rather conveniently. However, such were not the experiences of the upper-class women, barring a few. Their roles remained assistive. Such an experience in the movement has helped women like Fotme and Zaine to peacefully bring into coexistence their revolutionary selves performing domestic chores.

Thus, these narratives are in quite stark contrast with the participation of elite women. The ordinary women, after successful exposure to discourses of nation-building, retreated to perform their traditional roles. However, memory-keeping became intrinsically interconnected with their tradition. Through folk songs and storytelling, these women kept alive the events that have impacted their collective political future. Through these modes of communication, women educated generations of Kashmiris about their forbidden history. The years of colonial education that teaches the history of anti-colonialism in India, made no mention of the Dogras, or that of more recent history. Thus, women of the era became the pedestal on which the alternate repressed Kashmiri consciousness rests. There are thousands of folk songs that venerate the Sheikh for his contribution in awakening the repressed masses of Kashmir. Since women were performing traditional roles, it gave them plenty of time to capture glimpses of the politically turbulent times. Particularly, since writing as a medium of communication was still inaccessible to the masses, the tradition of oral history became a fundamental project alternative women's politics.

Women emerged in the political landscape of Kashmir during the movement that raised national consciousness against the monarchical Dogra

rule during the 1930s. After the formation of the Constituent Assembly in 1951, the Sheikh and his compatriots of anti-Dogra legacy came together to write the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir. Women who were closer to the newly established political power had an opportunity to develop skills of politics and diplomacy. Such an exposure, however, did not dismantle the gender roles of Kashmiri traditional society, and instead women learned to make distinctions between their personal and political lives. They became phenomenal leaders of masses and held political power and persuasive potential over thousands of young women, even as in their personal lives' traditional hierarchies continued to maintain a prefigured order. It is important to look at the experiences of elite women's agency separately from that of community leaders and activists, and to understand the nature of authority of the hierarchical relationship among women, to be able to construct an understanding of the collective and individual agency of the women.

NOTES

1. Lale Ded, also known as Lale Arifa or Lalleshwari, was a fourteenth-century mystic who engaged with two predominant ideologies of Shaivism and Sufism. Her poetry features a radical critique of social hierarchies and religious intolerance.
2. Habbe Khatoon (1554–1609) was a Kashmiri Muslim poetess and ascetic. She married Yusuf Shah Chak, the King of Kashmir. Her poetry is a manifestation of longing and trauma inflicted upon her, when her husband, the then king, was captured by the Mughal emperor Akbar and imprisoned in Bengal and who was later buried in Bihar.
3. Yusuf Shah-e-Chak was a ruler of Kashmir of the Shahmiri or Chak dynasty that ruled from 1579 to 1586. They originated from the Dardic people of Gilgit and Hunza.
4. The Treaty of Amritsar was signed on 16 March 1846 between the British East India Company and Gulab Singh Dogra after the First Anglo-Sikh War. Through this treaty Gulab Singh acquired Kashmir, along with its dependencies including, "all the hilly or mountainous country with its dependencies situated to the eastward of the River Indus and the westward of the River Ravi including Chamba and excluding Lahul, being part of the territories ceded to the British Government by the Lahore State according to the provisions of Article IV of the Treaty of Lahore, dated 9 March 1846. In return, Gulab Singh paid 7.5 million Nanak Shahis (the currency of the Sikh empire) along with other annual gifts and tribute. It marked the beginning of the infamous rule of Dogras in Kashmir".

5. Kashmir was annexed by the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh. The Sikh rule of Kashmir lasted from 1819–1846 and was terminated by the British-Dogra Treaty of Amritsar.
6. See Robert Thorp's *Kashmir Misgovernment* edited and with an introduction by F.M. Hussain. Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2011.
7. See Rao Farman Ali, *History of Armed Struggles in Kashmir*. Srinagar: Jaykay Books, 2017.
8. See Sheikh Showkat Hussain's article "Robert Thorp's Loyalties Lay with the British" in kashmirdispatch.com published on 22 November 2013. 'Gulab Singh's army was defeated near Sheikh Bagh and compelled to retreat from Kashmir. Those who got martyred in the battle of Sheikh Bagh were buried in vicinity of Sheikh Imam-ud-din's residence and the area was named as Shaheed Gunj. The graves disappeared with the passage of time but the name Shaheed Gunj still continues to be there.'
9. See Khalid Bashir Ahmad's article 'Of History and Possible "Heroes"' in therisingkashmi.com, published on 30 January 2018. 'When the troops of Gulab Singh arrived in Srinagar to take control of Kashmir, Sheikh Imam-ud-din offered resistance. A fierce battle ensued during which the Dogras suffered defeat and heavy casualties including the death of its commander, Lakhpat Rai. It was only through the British intervention that Gulab Singh was able to seize Kashmir. Sheikh Imam-ud-din resisting and defeating the Dogra army is only one part of the story. The other part is that the resistance was offered by him as an employee of the Lahore Darbar on the instructions of its minister, Lal Singh, and ceased the moment the British army intervened.

The long and short of the story is that following the Treaty of Amritsar, Gulab Singh's army headed by Wazir Lakhpat and Wazir Ratnu, arrived in Srinagar and asked Sheikh Imam-ud-din to hand over control of the city which he evaded as instructed by Lal Singh, who had enmity with Gulab Singh. Singh had instructed him not to surrender or hand over control to the Dogras'.

10. According to the tradition, the shawl industry in Kashmir was founded by a fifteenth-century ruler, Zayn-ul-Abidin, who introduced it from Turkistan. However, many scholars argue that due to the agrarian background of Kashmiri society since ancient times, shawls were woven in Kashmir in a more primitive manner. However, under the Sultans, the art received an upgrade to a more factory-based system with a robust division of labour. Subsequently, the industry became a substantial part of the economy of Kashmir under various rulers.
11. See Mridu Rai's *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.
12. See Thorp, *Kashmir Misgovernment*, p. 47: 'Here is an account of the first Demands Day of the shawl-bafts. Starvation and Famine conditions

produced mass discontentment in the valley, because the authorities could not import sufficient quantities of food grains. The worst sufferers were the shawl workers. The people had no course except to migrate to the plains or die of starvation. Such migration of the Kashmiri Muslim to Punjab led to the defamation of the Hindu Maharaja, and the British intervention of one kind or the other. Hence the Dogra Maharaja did not like fleeing of the people from the valley and sealed frontiers of his dominion... As soon as Ranbir Singh received information about the agitation, he ordered that the rebels be dealt-with very severely. He gave instructions to his governor that the dead bodies afloat the water, be got buried very secretly.'

13. See P.N. Bazaz's *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*. Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 1954, p. 127, 'I have already noted the unfortunate and narrow-minded attitude of the Pandit government employees towards the educated Muslim young men. That was one of the main causes which has given a communal bias to the tone and temper of the propaganda which the young men were carrying on in their limited circle. The surcharges atmosphere now prevailing in the country unbalanced the Pandit community. They became suspicious, terror-stricken and demoralized. Despite their glorious part in the freedom movement throughout the course of history and their manifold grievances against the Dogra rule, nothing to say their demand for freedom of press and establishment of constitutional government, they now began to look upon the Maharaja as their protector and refuge. They became defenders of the powers that were and thus came in clash with the dynamic times, It is a tragedy that even up to this day the majority of the Pandits have continued to maintain such an unhealthy and dangerous attitude towards the freedom movement.'
14. Khankah Moulla, which is situated on the banks of Jhelum River, is a religious shrine for Muslims and is also known for its important historical and political role in the resistance struggle.
15. Shazia Malik, in her paper 'Women's Resistance against the Dogra Rule in Kashmir', quotes Madhvi Yasin and Mohamad Yasin's *Mysteries and Glimpses of Kashmir*. New Delhi: Raj Publications India, 1999, pp. 197–198: 'remarkably, the women of the working classes of the Muslim society fought shoulder to shoulder with their counterpart against the injustice and misrule of the Dogra despots. Clearly, then during its first phase of the freedom struggle, the women participants came from the lower sections of society, illiterate and uneducated. These women of the lower orders were not led and organized by educated women but it was their movement that educated women joined later in the period.'
16. Martial law is the imposition of direct military control of normal civilian functions of government, especially in response to a temporary emergency such as invasion or major disaster, or in an occupied territory. It was regularly used by the Dogra rulers in Kashmir.

17. Farman Ali, *History of Armed Struggles in Kashmir*.
18. B.J. Glancy Commission appointed on 12 November 1931 by the Maharaja to investigate religious and general grievances of the people of Kashmir already submitted. It was headed by B.J. Glancy, a European officer of the Government of India.
19. The Naya Kashmir Manifesto was presented by Sheikh Mohamad Abdullah to the ruling Maharaja Hari Singh. It advocated for a working democracy and it called for a modern welfare state, land reform, and equal rights for women and religious minorities. Despite the popularity of the document, many of these ideals were derailed by the subsequent political conflict over the region.
20. See Christopher Snedden's *The Untold Story of People of the People of Azad Kashmir*. London: C. Hurst & Co., 2012.
21. See Andrew Whitehead, 'Kashmir's Forgotten Women's Militia', thewire. in published on 23 October 2017. 'In 1946, when many of the leaders of the National Conference were in jail, women came forward to sustain the political campaign against princely rule. According to Krishna Misri, who later enrolled in the women's militia, "the women leaders took charge and gave a new direction to the struggle". However the leaders addressed no controversial woman-specific issues for they did not want to come across as social rebels.'
22. The United Nations Security Council Resolution on Kashmir was adopted in 1948; it ordered both India and Pakistan to demilitarise the region and conduct a referendum to ascertain the wishes of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.
23. Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly of representatives elected in 1951 formulated the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir State.
24. See Jabbar Gockami, *The Politics of Plebiscite*. Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2007.
25. See Nyla Ali Khan, *The Life of a Kashmiri Woman: Dialectic of Resistance and Accommodation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
26. Interview conducted by the author in 2013.
27. Interview conducted by the author in 2013.
28. Interview conducted by the author in 2013.
29. Interview conducted by the author in 2013.
30. Interview conducted by the author in 2013.
31. Interview conducted by the author in 2013.
32. Interview conducted by the author in 2013.
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Resurgence of Muslim Consciousness and Islamic Liberation Theology

Abstract This chapter addresses the issue of Islam in Kashmiri politics and dissuades the use of Islamism as a blanket notion to understand Muslim societies. Religious resistance politics is a project of Islamicate modernity in which women created agential positions which culminated in an armed struggle in 1989. Through this chapter, I try to demonstrate that women's Islamicate political projects were formulated to challenge the social patriarchy and the Indian state. The Islamicate project was constructed as a response to the debilitating violent atmosphere endangering women's multiple identities. The complexity of the context and the difficulty of the agency are shown through an exploration of the women's narratives. Women's political action is historical and contextual in nature and aims at altering the lack of political freedom in the public space. In the 1980s armed struggle, women's activism took a new militant form when it targeted social and traditional gender roles.

Keywords Armed struggle • Islam • Politics • Women's organisations • Roles

The strategic dissident armed groups such as the Al-Fatah and Young Men's League were undercover operations from the 1960s to the 1970s. Al-Fatah was started in 1966. The popular narratives claim that Mirza Afzal Beigh and Sheikh Mohamad Abdullah were aware of its operation. However, it

remains contested whether they approved of Al-Fatah or not. The group's political imagination was influenced and inspired by the Algerian struggle against the French and the Palestinian struggle against Israel.¹ The group demanded complete disengagement with the political system and from the very beginning it kept Kashmiri political demands unaddressed. They argued that colonial regimes cannot acknowledge or recognise the rights of their subjects. Their ideas were rooted in a radical left-nationalist imagination that was shaped by the transnational influences of the Muslim nationalist movements in West Asia.

Sheikh Abdullah's second incarceration in 1953 lasted for almost eleven years, during which he was also accused in the Kashmir conspiracy case. The popular Plebiscite movement had failed, and his release from jail was seen as a 'sell-out', which gradually transformed him from the iconic Sher-e-Kashmir (Lion of Kashmir) to a collaborator in the popular political imagination. It had also finally put an end to the deeply divisive popular political culture manifest in sharp skirmishes between the *Sher* (literally 'lions', aka Kashmiri nationalists) and *Bakre* (literally 'goats', aka pro-Pakistan traditional clergy). The public shift towards Islamic identity and increasingly authoritarian state politics opened up the debates about contesting the political power via elections.

The project of reshaping political culture received a boost from a successful Islamic revolution in Iran in 1989 and then a continuing Afghan resistance to the Soviet invasion. These examples were helping reclaim and refashion traditional Islamic teachings (by now monopolised by the state) into a potent political weapon. Jamat-e-Islami (Congregation of Islam) Kashmir stepped up to the occasion and catered to the new enthusiasm towards a reformation in Islam.² The Muslim revivalist literature was made available in classrooms, lessons and religious sermons offered to young Kashmiris. The political ideology of Jamat insisted on the reintroduction of Shariah law³ as a source of political liberation. In 1982, Sheikh Abdullah's death and the transfer of power to Farooq Abdullah (his son), created a political shift in which the secular Indian system was neglecting Kashmiri political demands.

In 1983, these new ideas began to show as student mobilisations organised by the Islamic Students League (ISL).⁴ While gaining from these revivalist ideas, students reframed the question of political liberation of Kashmir while reasserting the Muslim identity of Kashmiris. ISL had a women's wing which offered space to young college students to engage with these ideas. As a result, the culture of student politics in

universities and colleges was reshaped. The discussions about Kashmir's political status were opening up conversations about social and cultural rights, especially those of women. Women talked about the right to self-determination, women's social rights ordained by Islam and the need to educate people about these issues. In addition to ISL, an all-women outfit, *Dokhtaran-e-Millat* (the daughters of the nation), started using revivalist ideas of Islam in 1982. The organisation began as a project of education for women who were unaware of their rights and duties according to Islam. Women's lack of awareness about their Islamic rights was said to be responsible for their subordinate position in Kashmir. Similarly, a Women's Welfare Organization was started in Islambad⁵ that attempted to address social and cultural issues that violated women's rights. The organisation catered to women from all religious backgrounds but later found itself split not over matters of religion but the political question of Kashmir.

Such splits, as in the case of the Women's Welfare Organization, point to the uneasiness of Kashmiri nationalist identity in the early 1980s, which was increasingly visualised as the pro-India state political formation. In the political culture, the hanging to death of a Kashmiri militant nationalist, Maqbool Bhat, in 1984 in Tihar Jail, New Delhi, had attracted little attention. However, for the radical Kashmiri nationalists it was a confirmation to start a strategic armed struggle. On the other hand, Islamists, who were by now popular in Kashmir, were still unaware of the fate of radical Kashmiri nationalists under the Indian political system.

By 1987 Islamists formed a political coalition called Muslim United Front (MUF)⁶ led by Jamat-e-Islami to contest elections against Sheikh Abdullah's son, Farooq Abdullah. The erosion of Kashmiri political autonomy, sidelining of Muslim identity and introduction of Shariah law was the rallying cry of the Islamist coalition. Furthermore, the National Conference and the Indian National Congress came to be seen as corrupt and domineering political forces. During the 1987 elections, Kashmir saw the highest voter turnout in favour of the Islamists, but the polls were rigged, angering Islamists and their supporters. This severely fractured any possibility for a political Kashmiri to seek change through an unrepresentative system. Both Maqbool Bhat's hanging and the rigging of the 1987 elections⁷ had now disillusioned Kashmiris of nationalist and Islamist inclinations and both were awaiting a spark that could shake things up. The flash came in the form of Afghanistan's successful resistance to the Soviet invasion in 1989, after which Kashmiris crossed over the Line of Control (LoC)⁸ into Pakistani-administered Kashmir in large numbers to receive arms training.

The upheaval had sent society into complete disarray and the need of the hour was to find out mechanisms through which to sustain a collective struggle and also devise a political response to the social crises instigated by violence. Therefore, women's organisations found themselves wedged firmly between the political and social needs of the people. It is in this context, Dokhtaran-e-Millat took a more militant position, and some members of the Women's Welfare Organization along with members of the women's wing of ISL-initiated Muslim Khawateen Markaz (MKM)—Muslim Women's centre. Both Dokhtaran

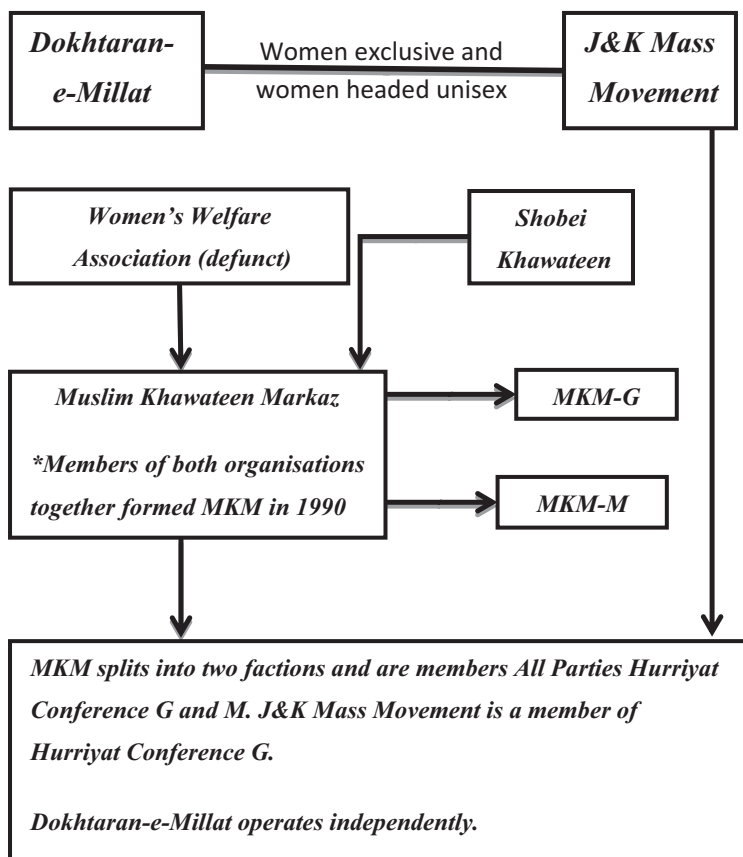


Fig. 3.1 Women's political organisation during the armed struggle

and Muslim Khawateen functioned as autonomous women's organisations wielding a parallel authority in the political movement. Apart from these two women's organisations, a woman led an all-male organisation called Jammu & Kashmir Mass Movement and this also presents an instance of women's political formulation. The organisation is an exception to the all-male pro-freedom parties where a woman is granted the decision-making powers. A genesis and association of women's pro-freedom organisations in Kashmir is presented in Fig. 3.1.⁹

THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

Identity is a vacillating momentary self-description which results from the interaction of self with the given political environment. Women too inherit identities other than gender, and in a free liberal political environment often identities become choices that can be discarded or embraced at will. In the early 1980s, the realisation that specific identities were under threat from a consistent political policy of the Indian state pushed Kashmiri people to reassert these identities. Additionally, women's reconstitution of these identities involved complex struggles which have been conveniently sidelined and forgotten.

Dokhtaran-e-Millat's leader Aasiyeh Andrabi invested herself in understanding the meaning and purpose of her Muslim identity. The way she has been projected in the prevalent discourses does very little to help us understand her constituting of a political project that could challenge forces responsible for de-politicisation of women in Kashmiri society. Though often branded as a single-minded radical, her journey disproves this myth and presents a complex figure at the heart of the Kashmiri Islamicate resistance.

Aasiyeh Andrabi considers her politics a moral one, the pursuit of which has made her more religious and also enabled her to help other women in their journeys for attaining piety. Such a choice was settled by the patriarchy encountered at her home and the lack of opportunity in the stifled public political environment. Aasiyeh completed her Bachelor's degree in Biochemistry from the University of Kashmir in 1981. She was mulling over her options for further education and decided to pursue a Master's degree in India. Her decision was vociferously opposed by her brother—a moment that sent her into depression. Eventually, an anthology, *Words from the Hearts of Women*, about women converts to Islam that Aasiyeh spotted in her father's library, offered her hope. The story of Maryam Jameelah in the anthology written in Urdu by Mail Kharabadi helped

Aasiyeh overcome depression and feel inspired again. Maryam Jameelah was a Jewish convert to Islam who Deborah Baker, in her book *The Convert*, dismisses for presenting a vicious portrait of America and accuses her of repudiating crimes committed by young terrorists.¹⁰ Maryam Jameelah accepted Maulana Maududi's¹¹ invitation to immigrate to Pakistan—where she lived as his daughter. Her transition from an American Jewish woman to a Muslim convert living in Pakistan—which was still in undivided British India—and advocating gendered roles for women underlined courage. A lesson on the courage to subvert social conditioning was impressed upon a young and depressed Aasiyeh. She began to wonder how a Jewish woman found emancipation in Islam while she born in a Muslim family knew nothing about it. The idealism of Maryam Jameelah's story is also underlined in Deborah's account—she terms Maryam as an idealistic believer in justice and a better world. Aasiyeh was mostly impressed by Jameelah's voice and her militancy in subverting the inherited social norms. It prompted her to begin a relentless quest for a militant woman in Islam that could radically reorder the skewed social and political landscape of Kashmir.

Many narratives present women's acts of witnessing as a defining feature of self-constitution. *Bakhtawar*, the first chairperson of MKM, narrated the incidents of regular clashing between youngsters and the police forces in the premise of the old *Baeje Mashide* (Jamia Masjid).¹² In the early 1980s, as a regular visitor to the mosque, she often witnessed stone pelting during these clashes. However, after the rigging of the 1987 elections, these protests intensified and eventually turned violent. During the mayhem, a curfew was imposed that held people indoors, but an emergency by way of a worsening eye-infection forced her younger brother to seek a doctor's appointment. However, he did not return, and Bakhtawar's family searched for him everywhere for many days. Eventually, they found him lodged in a notorious prison called Red 16.¹³ He was only eleven years old and suffered brutal third-degree torture which left him permanently disabled. For Bakhtawar, witnessing her brother's life in shambles made her contemplate over her identity as a Kashmiri—who was disposable and whose rights only existed on paper.

The witnessing encompassed observing and listening to the intergenerational trauma intertwined in the stories from the past and the truth of everyday occurrences. Farida Dar, the leader of the Jammu & Kashmir Mass Movement often heard discussions about her uncle—who was banished from Kashmir unfairly in 1947. When Farida was still a kid, her

uncle often sent telegrams expressing his longing for Kashmir and his wish to return. Farida never met her uncle, but his struggle and fate was a painful example of treatment meted out to Kashmiris who raised demands for rights. Her uncle's tale offered a possibility of self-constitution as it became a guiding treatise for her fight against the state.

Yasmin Raja, an activist with the MKM, grew up in Jammu which is afflicted by a deep religious polarisation between Hindus and Muslims. She studied in a school in the Khati Talao area, and a recurring incident of her teacher fainting in the class exposed her to a concealed 1947 history of a massacre of Muslims.¹⁴ Her classmates informed her that their teacher's constant fainting was linked to the trauma of witnessing the killings of most of her family members by the Hindu rioters. For Yasmin, such a revelation was enough to cement her beliefs and experiences as a daughter of a former Plebiscite Front activist. She realised the Kashmiri struggle for self-determination hadn't been successful because Kashmiris were predominantly Muslim. The hatred for Muslims was a defining feature of popular Hindu culture and, therefore, the Kashmiri struggle would reach nowhere without raising questions about its Muslim identity. The massacre, which was neatly covered up, was proof that there was no justice for Muslims or Kashmiris possible under the Indian system. She returned to Kashmir and formally joined MKM.

Many women abided by the moral code of Islamic duty where discussions about politics were secondary. This overbearing sense of responsibility was often framed in the ethical language of performing everyday humanity. Khadija Begum affiliated herself with ISL because of her devout religiosity and moral humanity and gained entry into the resistance movement. Islam teaches us to stand against oppression even when it goes against our own interests, she asserted. A large part of Khadija's faith in Islam involves helping others and keeping them safe from harm. In the 1980s she was a young mother raising her children in a turbulent downtown area of Batamaleun. The area had erupted uniformly for the freedom movement—young men had fled their homes in large numbers and crossed over the Line of Control into the other side of Kashmir under Pakistan's control to receive arms training. On their return, they would often get into trouble with the police or army. Their homes would be raided when they were secretly visiting their families. Khadija often saw them running amok, and trying to slip away from the police through the narrow lanes. She helped them and offered up her house as a space to hide. She was well aware that such an action endangered her own life. The moment of

connection was generated through empathising with other women whose young boys were risking their lives. She imagined herself in the position of these mothers and thought of her action as a service to her sisters if she kept their children safe. It eventually became her well planned political agenda during the armed struggle.

The narratives of self-constitution of women complicate the distinction between sensation and rationality. The affective experiences do not singularly form their subjectivity, but a rational negotiation with the context and identities helped women formulate a more vocal position in the armed uprising of Kashmir. Such negotiation involves responding to the setting, processing the experience and reflecting on limited choices. Therefore, examining the self-construction narratives of women in the armed struggle becomes a fundamental tool with which their political action can be accessed; one which is not available through a normative feminist lens. The political movements and organisations emanating from the self-consciousness of the individual women were addressing the issues of each of their inherited identities through which their political consciousness is constructed.

DOKHTARAN-E-MILLAT: LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF ISLAMIC LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The modern reassertion of Islam is pitted against the complacency of traditional Islam with the political order that disenfranchises ordinary Muslims. It is often traced to the vacuum created by the fall of Ottoman Empire (1918–1920)—which was seen as an emblem of Muslim political authority. The reassertion of Islamic political ideology tried to modernise and militarise Islam fighting colonialism and more recently militarism. This inversion of modern imperial political power contests the basic premise that consolidates contemporary nation-states. In Kashmir, this reassertion first appears in 1899 with the formation of *Anjumans*¹⁵ in Kashmir as a strategy to challenge the hegemonic Dogra rule.

Aasiyeh Andrabi belongs to an upper-class Sayed¹⁶ family, and historically Sayeds in Kashmir form the educated political class. Traditionally, this section of Muslims practised endogamy, mirroring the Brahmanical caste practises reorganising a new social hierarchy. For mostly uneducated Muslim masses, to be counted as educated or civilised demanded of them to reproduce social hierarchies and to find collaboration with already-

dominant elite groups. From her very childhood, Aasiyeh found herself cross with these ideas; she was asked not to befriend anyone unworthy of her patronage. Contrarily, she befriended a milkman's (seen lower in the caste order) daughter and had set a wave of disaffection towards her. She was reprimanded and punished for crossing a line. She was perturbed by such irrational fears of the oppressed classes and absolutely no amount of domination by the Indian state incurred such a response from her traditional Muslim family. The constant disagreement with her family over issues of social hierarchies, gender and the political status of Kashmir was forcing her to carve out her own path. When her brother vehemently opposed her decision to move out of Kashmir for further education, she was set into a tumultuous direction of self discovery.

She was deeply affected by the apolitical strain of Islam that sought to protect social hierarchies and conservative beliefs about women. When she discovered a strain of reassertion in Maryam Jameelah's Islam, she found a voice in its most militant form. She asserted 'Islam without politics is nothing' and it's a religion which is an absolute way of life. Aasiyeh argues that Islam's potential is in its radical message, through which it guides people on all aspects of life. When secularists say religion is a private matter they attempt to reduce religion to a set of irrational beliefs unrelated to the practical world. She claimed Islam has always guided people on all aspects of their life and is an absolute way of life. Therefore, she emphasised a return to the Islamic holy texts of the Quran and Sunnah (traditions of the Prophet) and reintroduction of the Shariah law.

Her religious and political idealism were further cemented by her experiences of witnessing political violence in the public sphere. In 1983, as a student of Anathnag College in Islambad district, she witnessed an army raid inside her college premises in 1983. It was a bid to control growing student protests, and students were dragged out of their classrooms and hostel rooms and beaten mercilessly, including women students. The treatment meted out to the students of her college by the Indian Army angered Aasiyeh. She climbed up to a pedestal and while addressing her fellow students questioned the army's high-handed response inside educational spaces. Thousands of students gathered around her, echoed her sentiments and raised slogans in favour of freedom and Islam and against the Indian state. In the charged atmosphere, she led the protesting students out of the college to the central city square where more civilians joined her, emboldening her voice even further.

The series of experiences with patriarchy and ultra-statist masculinity of the Indian armed forces pushed her to explore the political potential of Islam. In 1984, the Radio Pakistan broadcasted a programme teaching the Quran called *Haialalfalah* (come to the righteous path), which Aasiyeh regularly listened in to and used as a resource to learn from. Around the same time, her university mate Aabida, whom Aasiyeh had befriended for their mutual love for singing, invited her to join the religious classes organised by the Jamat-e-Islami Kashmir. Aasiyeh became a regular learner at the classes offered by the Jamat. However, soon she realised she disagreed with many of their political positions. She found that Jamat did not have a clear-cut policy on many issues—they unapologetically defended the anti-people state and admired Sheikh Abdullah's policies. By that time, Aasiyeh had come to detest Sheikh Abdullah's use of religion and religious sentiments to win Kashmiri people's support for increasingly *Indianised* state politics. Ultimately, she fell out with the Jamat and became invested in the self-study of religion. However, she had gained a reputation of her own in the religious circles, and a *Darsghah* (religious learning centre of children) in her neighbourhood offered her a job to teach the Quran to children. When she arrived to teach her class, she was overwhelmed by the fact that most of the mothers of these children knew very little about religion and the rights that it grants them as women. She turned the job down and instead decided to dedicate herself to educating women through Darsghahs that shaped women's politics across Kashmir.

She started the first women's Darsghah in Sazgaerpour in the year 1985, which aimed solely at granting women religious training. They catered to a small group of women in an old mud house in downtown Srinagar. The uncanny history of connection between the state and women's exploitation and prostitution since the Dogra rule, afforded Aasiyeh a tool with which to suspiciously look at the Indian state's relationship with Kashmiri women, especially in events claiming to present Kashmiri culture. Right from 1947, the emphasis on cultural events and appealing to cultural sense of Kashmiris is used to strengthen the Indian political control and has employed women from poorer sections to play out colonial representations of Kashmiri women. In 1985, the Ministry of Culture, New Delhi, flew a troupe of Kashmiri female folk dancers to Delhi, to perform in a cultural programme 'Jashn-e-Kashmir'. These dancers, from poorer sections of society, were compelled to take up this work. Dokhtaran women contemplated about the situation of the folk dancers and organised a full-fledged movement against it. They discussed women's exploitation and their sexualised use only for amusement in elite government circles. Dokhtaran drafted their first pamphlet, '*A Message to the Daughters of Fatima*' and distributed it among young women in various places in Srinagar. The political pamphlet raised several

questions asking women to contemplate their position in the world. It questioned women's exploitation and the gendered expectation of pleasing the opposite sex as their life-goals. Further, questioning state's role in the exploitation of women, the pamphlet offered religious piety as an alternative path for salvation and rights. Fatima Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet Mohamad, was used as an alternative symbol of piety and womanhood as against Bollywood's depiction of women. The spontaneous stand taken against the issue of women's exploitation got Dokhtaran public attention. They were applauded for their stand on the issue. The daily *Aftab*, a local newspaper, called them 'Dokhtaran-e-Millat', a name that they happily adopted. The single Darsghah branched out in every district of the Kashmir valley—women from the middle and lower classes became part of the movement. Dokhtaran organised a media cell, and Aasiyeh's lectures were recorded and made available as CDs and cassettes in local markets for wider consumption. The ISL responded to the new content and helped in the dissemination of islamic ideas of an assertive femininity among young students in universities and colleges. They actively worked towards the sale and distribution of these works.

The growing influence of religious education on public awareness put the Dokhtaran on the government radar. As a measure to curb this ideology, the government ordered the banning of Jamat-e-Islami Darsghahs. The ban on Darsghahs was interpreted as a ban on religious education, and though Jamat did not protest the ban, Dokhtaran took out a protest march from Sazgaerpour to Haval and broke open the locked Darsghah of Jamat. The local media covered the incident, and it added to the growing popularity of Dokhtaran.

In 1987, Dokhtaran decided to take its politics against women's exploitation to the next level. They organised a street procession of about ten thousand women, and armed with brushes and black paint they blacked-out posters of scantily clad movie stars. The idea was to question the normative commodification of women which the Indian state promoted as progress. Everything about commodification perturbed Dokhtaran; to sell a single matchstick even, they use a nude woman, argues Aasiyeh. The movement wanted to put across the point that the Muslim women were not commodities and morality politics is against such normalisation of exploitation. The government saw these protests as an expression of anti-state and pro-Pakistan politics. Her office was raided, and religious books including the copies of Quran were desecrated. This incident brought her in to the global headlines, branding her as 'women's Taliban'. India's leading anti-terror think-tank, the Institute for Conflict Management, categorised the group as a

‘soft’ terrorist outfit because it used threats and other ‘extra-legal’ means to spread its doctrine. The experience taught Aasiyeh her first political lesson that the state would not accommodate any other version of Islam except the one that grants legitimacy to the state. The state was threatened by women who were concerned about women’s exploitation and decided to brand them ‘terrorists’. By this time, the group was only interested in a radical social and a religious reorientation of society to encourage women’s rights and hardly had any funders. The state backlash included claims that Dokhtaran were funded by Pakistan and were dangerous, however, Aasiyeh claims the movement, from the beginning, has been funded and supported by its local members. The state backlash further radicalised Dokhtaran women who were now interested in taking on the state to expose its failure and oppressive policies prevalent in every facet of Kashmiri life. Soon enough, their political role was further cemented by the inception of a strategic armed struggle which radically reorganised public politics in 1989.

The manifesto of Dokhtaran rests complicatedly between two influential modern movements: feminism and Islam. Dokhtaran, though, claim this is not a feminist movement but an Islamic movement that is interested in re-educating women on the rights granted to them by Islam. But the quest to retrieve a more agential role for women in otherwise debilitating violent atmosphere shows that such amalgamation of different forces is a modern reformulation of political movements. It is also particularly in line with Kashmir’s cosmopolitan history which has reshaped collective identity while continuously understanding influences of diverse political forces. The political goal of Dokhtaran is to create pious political women who can question and critique the current political order. Kashmiri society is male-dominated and women are taught to be subdued and not resilient. They can’t have their own opinions or have their own politics. That is not how Islam describes women. Islam encourages women’s education and political role which can change the situation of Kashmiri women. With this spirit, Aasiyeh Andrabi began teaching her middle-class and lower-class women students. The Islamic movement argues that the cultural ideals of womanhood, whether in the form of poets Habbe Khotoon or Lale Ded, teach women perseverance and train them to accept their fate in the face of trying hierarchical social and gendered cultural norms. However, Dokhtaran argues that in Islam women are not ordained to value themselves only in relation to men. Women are of value on their own and not just in their gendered roles. Women can change their situation of oppression if they know their rights in Islam. Islam grants men and women spiritual equality even if they have differential roles. It has reoriented the norm

which treats women as commodities and gifts to be transacted as for this reason too Muslim women should not change their surnames after getting married and taking their husband's name. Muslim women must retain their identity and end their dependency on male norms. Once women understand and demand these rights ordained to them by Islam, it will shift the widespread gender imbalance in Kashmiri society.

Dokhtaran further argue that in matters of politics, Islam has asked women to make their own decisions. If Kashmiris were granted a referendum to determine their political situation, women could not prioritise their husbands', fathers' or brothers' votes over their own or obey the commands of their men. This is not accepted in Islam because women are also gifted with capabilities and faculties to make their own decisions. In the Quran, the story of Firaon (Pharaoh from ancient Egypt) is a reminder that women are granted a political will of their own. When Firaon proclaimed that he was the God, he was opposed by someone he least expected. His own wife Aasiya rejected his claim and termed him boastful and arrogant. For her audacity to go against her husband—the self-proclaimed god—she was punished. Firaon ordered her to be executed, and she went to the gallows leaving an example for believing women. The story is a clear reminder to women that they should stand by the truth and oppose the arrogance and high-handedness of the political orders or systems, even if it goes against their own families. Aasiyeh weaves in this Quranic story to reflect on her own political actions in Kashmir, placing herself on a moral pedestal:

She (Asiya the wife of Pharaoh) rejected the God of her time and I, reject the god(s) of my time, whether Manmohan Singh or Omar Abdullah or Narendra Modi. I reject their treacherous oppressive rule in Kashmir. For this, they can jail me, torture me or do whatever that they have been doing. Nobody can tell me; you are a woman and woman has to be submissive. A woman's submission like men is ultimately to God¹⁷...

The acceptable politics according to Dokhtaran is a moral politics based on the principles of justice as envisioned by Islam. Modern politics and statecraft are not permissible for either men or women for the fact that they undermine the crucial question of justice, as is the case in Kashmir. Dokhtaran rejects modernity, secularism and its attendant statecraft. Instead, Dokhtaran demands a Caliphate which is not defined in terms of its governing systems but more in terms of a Pan-Muslim geographic location which is marked by the rule of Shariah law. Furthermore, in their

idealism, Shariah law represents the epitome of justice which is otherwise elusive under the present political and occupational order. This idealism is further strengthened by repression and political violence perpetrated routinely against its members including Aasiyeh Andrabi who is imprisoned on a routine basis.

Dokhtaran maintains that gender roles are natural but there is spiritual equality between men and women. They have same rights but different duties. Islam makes men guardians and protectors of women because society is profoundly unequal. They argue these are pro-women steps which bargain with patriarchy and ensure safety and security of women. At the beginning of Islam, girl-infants were buried alive due to deep-rooted hatred for girls and when Islam asked men to abhor such practices women's protection could be ensured. This is why Islam emphasises men's role as only protectors and guardians—not as women's owners.

When society is hardly equal, modernity pushes women into the public space where they are neither safe nor equal. In fact, they are more at risk, and vulnerable, Dokhtaran argues. The roles are divided based on the potential and strengths of each gender. Men are stronger and better equipped to deal with stress and better disposed to be rulers. While women do not fare well in stressful situations and are often short-tempered as a reflection on her personal life, Aasiyeh says:

I know this from personal experience; if I could have my way, I would have divorced my husband [a] hundred times in a single day.

Dokhtaran defends many patriarchal positions to create a strategic struggle against the traditional patriarchy that denies women their rights and pushes for their complete subjugation. Dokhtaran takes practical steps to redress the social situation and demands justice for women and the weaker sections of the society. Dokhtaran preaches against caste hierarchy and has taken steps to dissolve it through encouraging inter-caste marriages among its members. Aasiyeh herself married a non-Sayed Islamic militant commander, Ashiq Hussain Faktoo, who is currently serving a life imprisonment sentence for the murder of Hriday Nath Wanchoo (a Kashmiri human rights activist).

Dokhtaran has fought constant battles for women's right to education, women's economic rights and issues of dowry deaths and so on. They were banned and curbed by the state regularly, and for society, Dokhtaran was too radical. For its members, Dokhtaran offered an escape from repression and loss of political voice. Additionally, Dokhtaran has faced

stiff opposition from the traditional clergy in Kashmir. It was hard to convince the traditional clergy that apart from household chores and child-rearing, it was women's right to receive religious education.

The opposition to Dokhtaran was tremendous as it was actively trying to politicise women and inform them that they could defend their own rights. Aasiyeh was often told to stop teaching, or her students were not allowed to come to the class. In 1983, Andrabi held an *ijtimah* (religious conference) at a mosque in Nawab Bazer near Hilalia Darsgah. At the mosque, the Imam Mufti Rashid had locked the mosque before Andrabi's arrival, even though he a priori agreed to provide space to women for a religious conference. Having been informed about the Mufti's decision of not allowing women into the mosque since it was against Islam, Andrabi decided to engage the Mufti in a religious duel and sought his explanation as per the Quran and Sunnah. He appeared to be very stubborn and adamant. What transpired between the Mufti and Andrabi is of fundamental importance to the discussion on patriarchy. Andrabi refuted Mufti's arguments favouring women's domesticity. She argued that Allah (God) has indeed put the responsibility of religious duty on both men and women equally and has obliged women to carry out the task of educating others. She cited the example of the Prophet's wife Ayesha, as the most significant religious scholar after the Prophet, and her scholarly contribution to Islam of foundational significance. She argued, through examples of Muslim women in Islamic history, that it is clear that no such domestic restriction was actually a part of Islamic tradition. The Mufti had to admit that his religious interpretation was unsubstantiated by the tradition of Islam. In this manner, the Dokhtaran was able to open some mosque spaces to women in Kashmir. The Dokhtaran started an intensive campaign against the social evils of dowry, exploitation of women in workplaces and economic exploitation in domestic spaces. Door-to-door campaigns were designed to introduce Shariah law and women's rights to the Kashmiri people. Dowry is an anti-Islamic act and detested by God, and women's earnings belong to them and should not be snatched from them. The places women work at and the jobs women do must ensure their honour and respectability; professions that harm women's esteem or jeopardise their social position are also against the Shariah. The Dokhtaran upheld women's emancipation through their journey towards piety but recognised a paradox in such a women's movement. Andrabi argues that in many cases of oppression against women reported to Dokhtaran office, she found perpetrators often to be women. Therefore, to change the situation for women, they have to often stand against one another when it is the

women who help preserve male-dominated systems. She argues, in order to ensure a gender just society, women have to often stand against women too who defend the traditions of male domination. While feminism says you should only favour women because they are women, Islam recognises this dichotomy and this is why Islam is an alternative, says Aasiyeh.

On the question of women's economic independence, Dokhtaran argued Shariah puts no obligation of earning or supporting a family on women. It is entirely a man's responsibility to take care of the family. The man must take care of women's economic needs, and in a covenant for a marriage, a man must prove that he will take care of woman's personal needs. He has to facilitate his wife's education if she so wishes. Aasiyeh argues that society readily accepts the new social pressure that modernity brings and makes working for both men and women necessary. But no one cares to look at what it actually does to society. Women who work in corporate offices—are they really empowered and independent? In Kashmir, salaries of working women are snatched the moment they receive them. It goes into sustaining families, or even distant relatives, and a woman hardly has any control over her own earnings. It is neither beneficial to her nor is it a means of security. The question of women's independence is something else—it is not only in doing corporate work but in finding a respectable place to work and having control over how the money earned is spent. Shariah ordains women must work in respectful places, must have power over their earnings and must be free to spend it as they please. Aasiyeh's assistant is a businesswoman who earns enough money to support and help even poorer members of the organisation. She exemplifies what a woman's economic work should be. Dokhtaran claims Shariah ordains men never to take money from their women unless if a woman out of her own love gives it. On the other hand, a woman does not need the permission of her husband to spend his money, because to sustain a family is primarily a male job.

Politically, Aasiyeh comes from a family of influential political activists. Her uncle, Ghulam Mustafa Alvi, was a pioneer in the Al-Fatah movement who was exiled. Her cousin Dr. Mohamad Seyed Geelani used to be a close friend of Maqbool Bhat. Her elder brother Andrabi was part of Jamiat-e-Toulaba (Student's organisation). Her youngest paternal uncle was killed in 1947 during protests against the Dogras. Her politics was thus informed by a unique alternative history of political repression in Kashmir. Her Islamic feminism mixed with her radical resistance to the Indian rule of Kashmir created an explosive politics. The project of Dokhtaran attempted a radical reading of Kashmiri society but resorted to desperate reactionary politics which was demanded by the urgency of

decay and distraught in an insurgency-stricken Kashmir society. Their interest to expose the state's rotten record in promoting sexual exploitation, drug abuse and alcoholism made them adopt vigilante approaches and tried policing public behaviour, especially with regard to the involvement of young women. She questioned the state's patronage of public spaces like internet cafés and gardens where young teens were allowed to engage in free sexual relationships. In 2006, Dokhtaran played a vital role in the exposé of a prostitution ring in which top-rung bureaucrats and incumbent ministers were involved.¹⁸

MUSLIM KHAWATEEN MARKAZ¹⁹: MUSLIM IDENTITY AND KASHMIRI NATIONALISM

Parallel to the political activism of Dokhtaran, the student's movement was articulating a very different political position. Though they were inspired by the new zeal of Islam, yet they wished to preserve some of the old ways and methods in which Kashmiri society worked. They were trying to bring many diverse forces to work together—ISL women were reimagining an Islam-inspired Kashmiri nation. ISL, formed in the early 1980s, involved women mostly in the hope of acquainting them with the political issues of Kashmir. ISL was making a reply to the former Kashmiri nationalism by unapologetically accepting Muslim identity as the part of Kashmir's political liberation project. They were constantly arguing that Muslim identity had no conflict with secularism. But they rejected the statist secularism that was unwilling to recognise the historical oppression on Muslims of Kashmir. They further argued that Islam teaches Muslims to coexist with dignity and respect with non-Muslims but does not allow them to buckle under the pressure of others. Maqbool Bhat's hanging to death in 1984 provided the first impetus for students to organise ISL.

The activities of ISL attracted women students in vast numbers, including unlettered women like Rahma. Rahma never went to college but listening to friends and family about new ideas of freedom and self-determination made her emotional about the cause. And when ISL started recruiting women, she joined out of sheer passion for demanding change in the status quo. They worked tirelessly as emissaries of the movement and travelled from village to village with the message of fighting oppression. They addressed people as envoys of freedom, explaining to them the need for the right to self-determination, encouraging them to send their daughters and sons to be part of the movement. At first, the movement

involved women only in supportive roles, as sisters of the male members, but it was soon understood that women would need more space and representation. Until the crucial 1987 election, ISL conducted religious festivities such as the celebration of Prophet's birthday as a platform to reach out to ordinary people with their political message. Many young men like Yasin Malik and Ashfaq Majeed who later crossed the LoC to receive arms training were actively involved in ISL activities.

After the 1987 election-rigging episode, ISL women began to contemplate more independent action. As a response to the political event, they held a Kashmir-wide women's convention in Hotel Taj, Srinagar. ISL men backed the women's independent initiative. At the convention, women discussed the increasing suppression of dissent by the Indian state and the closing of all methods to achieve the right to self-determination. These activities were in no way normal for the gendered Kashmiri society that ordains women's domestic roles alone. However, women fearlessly came out in large numbers and built the women's centre. The centre was run with the aid of a common fund generated through member contribution. The more the women engaged in political work, the more they realised the need for their own freedom and liberation. This was the first time they could shape their own ideas and challenge the patriarchal authority that was dictating terms and conditions for conducting their public lives.

The first women's convention at Hotel Taj was literally laughed off by the press fraternity. Despite being invited to the event, not a single press person turned up to cover it. This is how seriously Kashmiris took women, remarks Maryam. Maryam was the head of the women's wing—she came from a family of political activists. Therefore, she was slightly more skilled at the nitty-gritty of running a political organisation. With the members, she decided to frame the organisation giving it a proper structure and mission. There was a general secretary, a president and rigorous membership policy in place. Much of the organisation's records were destroyed during various police crackdowns, regrets Maryam.

The money was raised, and the women members were paid allowances so nothing would stop them from coming to the organisational activities because many women's families were not supportive. Women experienced feelings of confidence, sisterhood and willingness to sacrifice personal benefits for public good. In the 1980s when photocopiers were yet to arrive in Kashmir, women sat all night long in groups, writing posters and pamphlets, suffering excruciating pain in their hands and body which was endured with the help of their vigour for the cause. These night groups

would be organised in the homes of different members. Sharife remembers, 'Our hands would hurt and feel numb from all that writing'.

Soon after the 1987 convention, the leaders of ISL, along with leaders of the women's wing, contemplated the idea of having a separate autonomous Muslim women's pro-freedom organisation. The first office was set up at Magarmal Bagh. The goal was to go beyond Srinagar and involve women from other districts as well. In Islambad some former members of the social Women's Welfare Organization, including Anjum Zamarud Habib, were involved in the idea of an all-women pro-freedom organisation. Thus, MKM came into existence in 1987.

As MKM began its operations, the movement slowly spread to all parts of Kashmir valley. They regularly consulted ISL on addressing day-to-day issues and choice of political methods. Women had to devise their own ways, and find inspirations they could emulate. To be able to demand freedom, women must first be free; this is how many women thought about the organisation's motto. Following the examples of Palestinian revolutionary Leila Khaled and Egyptian Islamist Zainab Al-Ghazali, the women of MKM wanted to become examples of the utmost discipline and character for other women to emulate. They were aware that society was against their proactive political roles, thus they had to tread with caution to lead the way for many to follow. With a strong character and altruistic behaviour, MKM women were changing not just their own lives but also that of the nation. Attracted to a new resilient face of a Kashmiri woman, women in large numbers began to join MKM. Even conservative families would encourage their daughters, wives and sisters to become members of MKM.

As MKM began to broaden its area of influence, it caught on to the pulse of society. Freedom as an ideal is also connected to real social, economic and personal burdens. For ordinary women to experience what MKM was doing, they needed support in these areas of their life. There were growing concerns about sexual vulnerability and violence as society was gradually drifting towards a more violent resistance. They found the issue of sexual abuse very hard to address even among the organisation members. Many claimed that nothing of that nature happens in Kashmir. Even though the elite women hardly felt the need to address such issues, MKM made it a point that they should be educated about how women from other economic backgrounds suffer in Kashmir. They developed outreach programmes to educate women in far-flung villages about sexual violence and women's vulnerability. Thus, amidst the movement for national liberation, sprouted the project of advocacy for women's rights. It was a fundamental

women's right that women don't live under political occupation, argues Maryam. A free political environment is a forward step to ensuring women's rights and therefore women's participation in such a project for national freedom should be obvious. A free and fair political environment can accommodate discussions on women's rights. MKM started supporting women with their domestic and legal issues. They encouraged them to settle their problems without using court systems and institutions—which they believed were unfair to Kashmiris.

They relied on traditional religious education centres—Darsghahs—to further their political agenda. The first Darsghah, called *Al-Habib*, was opened in Srinagar, where women could become members, gain a religious education but also connect with each other. These were something of the nature of modern day cafés, where women could network and acquire new information on the movement. The Darsghah branched out to Langathe, Aetzel and Handwor as these were garrisoned areas in the late 1980s. Each Darsghah worked autonomously but in coordination with the Srinagar head office.

THE ARMED STRUGGLE AND THE QUESTION OF FREEDOM

In late 1989, when the movement took a violent turn, Dokhtaran and MKM were now addressing abrupt changes in society. Dokhtaran, due to its radical politics, could not solve many of the social concerns. Instead, political incarceration became the fate of its members. Many former ISL members started the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), an organisation whose goal was to fight the Indian rule of Kashmir and form an independent Islam-inspired nation of Kashmir. MKM in no way was a support organisation to JKLF. It continued to create a complex role for itself during these tumultuous times. Many former members of MKM claim that without their network of support no society could dare plunge into such violent politics.

MKM women found themselves suddenly grappling with a completely different reality—Kashmir was changing. The comfort of knowing how things work was no longer there; women no longer knew what would happen next and what they should plan or prepare for. To demand freedom and to be passionate about it was one thing, but to see death, violence and bloodshed forced them to rethink their political action beyond political outreach.

Men were dying, young women were getting orphaned or widowed, and they had no one to support them. MKM was aware that many women

hardly knew how to tackle issues of sexual violence, and had no means to report or resist such advances. Even in Srinagar, reports of sexual violence, death and missing men were pouring in regularly at the MKM office. The increase in such reports was overwhelming for the MKM members; their political outreach was too little to cater to such a drastic violent shift in society. But they worked tirelessly to do whatever they could. The scene in Srinagar was so intense that news from other areas did not register initially. It was only when they visited a far-flung village in Kashmir where one of their affiliates, Khazer Mahmoud, was shot dead, that they met hundreds of women survivors who had no idea why they were subjected to such acts. Women were raped by the Indian forces when they were doing their regular chores, like collecting firewood or working in the fields. This incident forced MKM to elevate their programmes to address such issues. They heightened their district-wise outreach programmes. These women headed programmes that were designed to bring information from far-flung areas. They had to report on insurgency-related issues including incidents of violence against women. Through these programmes, they were also increasing their membership and outreach.

The MKM women were tending to the wounds of either militants or ordinary civilians hurt in the crossfire. And it was evident that with the kind of circumstances engulfing Kashmir, skilled medical care professionals were needed for emergency response. Through networking, MKM put together emergencies response teams by linking up with hospitals. MKM members were trained as nurses and first aid providers. More than sixty members of MKM were trained as nurses and paramedics. Sharife was a member of MKM and a student at Amira Kadel College. She vividly recalls how such training came to her aid in dealing with one such emergency. As the college closed at 5 pm, students were slowly leaving the campus via its main gate. Crossfire between the army and militants ensued. Sharife was still inside with her friends when they heard gunshots. She felt alarmed while she ran to the main gate and found a student with a bullet wound to her leg. She immediately began to attend to her, and she still realises how happy she was about her paramedic training. Unfortunately, the student was not able to survive the injuries and later succumbed. Sharife held a press conference inside the college premises condemning the army action. Her activism led to the army crackdown on the students, and she had to go into hiding.

MKM attention was also drawn to the Indian media's reportage on the movement, which they considered as misleading and sheer propaganda for

the Indian state. The attitude of the Indian press made MKM angry; they wanted the truth to be heard across the world about Kashmir's struggle for freedom from India. The members deliberated on various ways in which this deafening propaganda could be shattered. They eventually realised that they needed a media cell to counter the Indian propaganda on Kashmir. The women's media cell, armed with cameras, began creating content to be sent to media houses outside India. They were making video messages, reports and recording speeches that were then sent out. Another vital task was to capture the brutal incidents of rape, violence and destruction of property. Women, armed with cameras under their Pheran (cloaks), were secretly visiting different far-flung regions of Kashmir recording the incidents of army high-handedness.

As the armed struggle continued, MKM struggled to keep its activities going. One of the significant hurdles was funds. The funds that initially were raised by means of door-to-door campaigns and donations were not enough for the kind of outreach that was needed. The MKM head Bakhtawar, along with the senior leaders, began thinking along the lines of self-help. The first economic activity was the New Kashmir pickle that was sold at Rs. 20. The self-help groups comprised of MKM members and were set up in Srinagar. MKM's political work hit a terrible roadblock with Bakhtawar's sudden appearance in the limelight. She was at risk; she had saved a wanted militant Hameed Sheikh after he was injured in an army attack. She could no longer be at the forefront of the struggle. She was sent into hiding. Anjum Zamarud Habib became MKM's new chairperson.

Anjum is a revolutionary woman from an educated family in Islambad. Her revolutionary potential was very well known in her alma mater, Anathnag College. As she resumed duties as a chairperson, she revived MKM with new energy. Many of its outreach programmes were further strengthened. In 2003, Anjum Zamruda Habib was arrested in a Havala case and incarcerated in solitary confinement for five years in Tihar Jail. Yasmin Raja took over the organisation and in some ways tried to raise demands for Anjum's release at the behest of Anjum's family.

MKM is an interesting political outfit where the fight against patriarchy converged with the political cause. From the beginning, they were considered an unnecessary nuisance and too radical. People would often tell them, 'Men have failed in this political struggle, what will these women achieve?' Maryam remembers that in the early days of the organisation she was often pressurised to cover up even though she was a Muslim who wore a headscarf; for many, it was not enough. She was asked to get fully veiled

to be able to be taken seriously. But she stood her ground and defended her decision that Islam cannot be enforced on others; this is what the Quran itself teaches us. Many women remember their struggles in the early days with a spark in their eyes—times they experienced freedom, where they could fight back against sexism. Masrat was often reminded by others not to shun her domestic roles and preached about what was women's actual place. But she boldly defended her politics by providing examples of other Muslim women leaders like Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan. Not just in the public space, they had to fight battles within their own families, to defend their decisions of taking such proactive political roles in society.

Unlike in the popular imagination, the women of MKM hardly internalised inferiority. They believed in defending the cause of freedom; they were equal to men. Their struggles and contributions were important while as male leadership was oblivious to women's efforts and could not strategize to bring in an inclusive mandate. Leaders are moral, spiritual and political guides of a nation but if they are oblivious to how society works and what women's place is in society, those leaders will undoubtedly fail. If women must function regardless of the violence that engulfs society then how many leaders understand the nature of that contribution?, asks Maryam.

Eventually, many MKM women left the movement, including Maryam. Nevertheless, all of them remember their brief political stint as the closest they have come to freedom. The intense backlash of counterinsurgency and the gendered nature of militarisation forced many women to choose regular lives. Some got married, and some decided to watch the movement passionately but silently from a distance. For many women, to be political was no longer an option because their husbands would not accommodate such a choice. They were forced to live anonymously even for the protection of their families and children. For many, the overbearing influence of patriarchy in the movement was simply unbearable. According to Maryam, 'leadership appreciated and supported women, but the patriarchal norms were intact, it was hard to work in the movement bearing this obvious flaw and in it is also one of the reasons why the movement failed.'

Pushing back against the patriarchal overtones of the movement, this organisation was a parallel place where women's problems were discussed and mattered. 'We were influenced by Islam that encouraged us to bring women from all walks of life together no matter what their political inclinations were—whether secular or religious or whatever', says Maryam.

THE J&K MASS MOVEMENT²⁰: GENDER AND POLITICAL PERSECUTION

The Jammu Kashmir (J&K) Mass Movement traces its roots from the formation of a single coalition of Islamists like the MUF in 1986. Moulana Abbas Ansari, a religious scholar and political science graduate, played an essential role in bringing together various scattered Islamist parties. After the election in 1987 was rigged, mass arrests of Islamist-nationalists followed. The need for legal aid was tremendous. The supporters of MUF started a legal aid organisation called Kashmir Liberation Council in 1988 to deal with legal cases against MUF members more efficiently. Two of the lawyers who were part of the cell were Ghulam Rasool Sailani and Mir Shafkat Hussian. Farida Dar, a young woman, by being related to some of the Islamists, became aware of the work of the legal cell and decided to participate in their activities. She learnt law and saw first-hand how it worked. This is where she came face to face with the political issues that Kashmiri society was facing. However, in attempts to curb the political activities of Islamists, the government came down heavily on the organisation. Several of its members were killed including lawyer Ghulam Rasool Sailani. Farida was a witness to the murder of another member, Nazir Ahmad Sofi, right in the office premises.

Under such repressive atmosphere, the burden of continuing the organisational work fell on Farida's shoulders. As time went by, the situation only worsened, members of the organisation were either killed or disappeared. It became harder to continue fighting by invoking the law. As the state repression increased, more people found it pointless to fight for their rights using the law of the state. With the eruption of the armed struggle in 1989, Farida converted the organisation from a legal aid organisation into a full-fledged political organisation committed to fighting the Indian rule in Kashmir. The organisation was renamed as the Kashmir Mass Movement, and it was opened for membership for ordinary people. Many former members of the legal cell encouraged her move, and many lawyers eventually steered clear. Farida was now a leader of a party with predominantly male members. Her authority was accepted, but she had harder battles to fight. The fear of state repression was making people abandon the cause—ideological differences were creeping into the ranks. Much like a dedicated leader, her toughest battles were in holding the organisation together as one group. She had to mediate and mitigate personal discords and ideological rivalries.

Farida believes the armed struggle in 1989 was hardly possible without women. The women provided the bedrock for something like that to function. Farida had an overview of society; she was not just seeing the war that was being waged against the government but also witnessing the transformation of Kashmiri society. The ones who were getting killed, their families, wives and children, thus her insight was important for the male activists. She was controlling their overbearing masculinity and streamlining it in a direction that was both strategic and useful for the greater political goal of freedom. Ideological bickering was a nuisance—it was engaging young boys into pointless debates. At that point, it was not important if people wanted Islam or secularism or Islamic secularism, what was important was how to get India out of Kashmir. Farida's overarching wisdom was recognised and consulted by the male members of the organisation. The activist men came to her with their families' problems—she took interest and strove to resolve those problems so men could concentrate on the political struggle. Many times she encouraged their wives and daughters to become members of the organisation.

Women were not victims, though like men they suffered terribly. They were hardly standing by and bemoaning their ill-fate. Women plunged into action and took roles they were scarcely familiar with in the times of crisis. While men were regularly killed, women too were killed and, despite the dangers of sexual violence, they played out strong political roles. Farida argues that on the path of freedom when a woman suffers sexual abuse, she is not just a victim; she is a martyr just like Hazrat Sumayeh—one of the earliest martyrs of Islam.

The J&K Mass Movement had almost equal participation from women, and Farida's leadership helped their presence even more. While visiting different areas in the north and south of Kashmir, Farida had witnessed places where women literally did not leave their homes, but the death of a male family member or disappearance had pushed women to the forefront of the struggle. Women were now making trips to police stations and army camps looking for their relatives and taking care of their homes and hearths.

The J&K Mass Movement was one of the first organisations to reach out to the survivors of sexual violence by the Indian Army. Farida remembers the case of a mother and daughter in Handwor who were raped in the same room in their house. Women activists of the J&K Mass Movement had to fight with police officials to be able to visit the duo. Farida was one of the crucial activists to expose the rape of the schoolgirl Tabinda Ghani who was forcibly taken to the gardens close to her school when she was returning home and raped by Indian soldiers.

Not very different from her peers in Dokhtaran or MKM, Farida has had her share of experience with the state. Events took an interesting turn in May 1996 when a bomb exploded in Lajpat Nagar, New Delhi. The ripples of this were felt in Farida's life. In 1989, one of her brothers had joined several other men in crossing the LoC into Pakistan administered Kashmir for arms training and returned to take part in the war for independence. Authorities had started asking Farida about her brother's details, where he was and so on. Farida claims she was genuinely unaware of those details as in those days once the boys became militants their contact with their families was minimal to ensure they would not fall into the security dragnet. They lived with friends or complete strangers in hideouts to perform their political activities. Farida's source of information was hearsay; she once heard her brother had returned and then he was arrested, and finally he had managed to escape from the prison. Apart from that, she knew little. Her brother's involvement in the armed struggle further complicated Farida's political work. She was seen as his ally or confidante and hardly taken seriously for what were her own political positions. The police frequently sought her in connection to her brother; her home was often raided and that forced her to leave her house and work from undisclosed locations. For many months she lived in a rented house in Bemeun.

As the bomb blast rocked Lajpat Nagar area, killing thirteen people, the TV screens flashed Farida's brother's name as an accused. Farida's brother was on the run, but when police prepared the charge sheet on 26 August 1996, Farida was shocked to find her name also as one of the accused. It did not alarm her, because she was quite used to the police coming after her. She thought it was as usual police trying to harass her and make her stop her political activities. When a police van came to arrest Farida at her home, she locked the gate of her house and went with them. The police were disrespectful and treated her as if her involvement had already been proven beyond any shadow of a doubt. As the police van drove, she realised she was being taken to Delhi, which was quite unusual. For Farida, as a woman, who had never travelled out of Kashmir, it was a nerve-wracking experience. In the following days, she was brought to Lodhi Road police station in New Delhi for a remand of twenty-six days. There were massive protests in Kashmir demanding her release, but to no avail.

Farida remembers the experience of being in Delhi with horror. She found herself amidst jeers and sneers of people, feeling like a monkey in a zoo. She was forced to present details of her brother though she had not seen him for two years. She was consistently called a terrorist and

tortured in police custody. She became subject of a vicious media trial and was soon lodged in Tihar Jail.

Farida reached Tihar Jail amidst the crowd of three hundred jail inmates waiting to take a peek at the most dreaded terrorist. Farida laments that exposing oneself to such an environment where one feels stripped of any honour often does not count as the contribution of women in the resistance. On 20 November 2000, a Sessions Court filed a charge of murder, attempt to murder and anti-national activities under the Explosives Act against Farida. The ten accused, including Farida, claimed innocence. In 2009, the District Judge transferred the case to additional sessions Judge S.P. Garg. Farida spent seven years in jails facing torture and humiliation until 8 April 2010, when a city court acquitted her and three other accused while convicting six others. After the acquittal, Farida resumed her political work and this time her focus shifted drastically. She focussed more on women, due to concern emanating from her own experience of lack of understanding about a political career and things that can happen while fighting a draconian state. Under Farida's leadership, the movement grew stronger, and she decided to involve more women in the struggle. Politicising women became a fundamental goal of this organisation since she suffered as a woman and considered it to her duty to pass on greater political understanding to other women. Furthermore, she also started addressing women-specific issues such as sexual violence, loss of family members and tried to reach out to women. Her organisation is a member of Hurriyat G faction of the Hurriyat Conference. The J&K Mass Movement thus far is the only organisation that has a membership of both men and women and is still functional.

NOTES

1. See Rao Farman Ali's *Kashmir Under the Shadow of Gun: Making of Alfatah*. New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 2012.
2. Jamat-e-Islami Kashmir (Islamic gathering of Kashmir) arose in tandem with Muslim revivalist movements in Egypt in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood of Hassan Al Banna (1928), and Jamat-e-Islami of Maulana Abu Ala Maududi (1941) formed in the British India. Jamat had a reformist and revivalist agenda which culminated in the formation of *Anjumans* (Islamic schools) for Kashmiri Muslims who were largely kept uneducated by the Dogra rulers and traditional sufi clergy. Maulana Rasul Shah formed the Anjuman Nusrat ul-Islam (The Society for the Victory of Islam) in 1899 which aimed to impart both modern and Islamic education to the Muslims of Kashmir. Jamat-e-Islami continued the tradition finding inspiration from

the Indian subcontinent and the downfall of Ottoman Caliphate. The first all British India *Ijtema* or religious conference was held in Pathankot in 1945. It was attended by four Kashmiris who then popularised these new influences on the reformist thinking as Jamat-e-Islami Kashmir.

3. Muslims in the state were governed by customary laws and up until 2007 there was no legal framework for applying Shariah law. The criminal legislation of the state however is not included under Shariah Law.
4. ISL is a political party organised since 1985 by Kashmiri college students to protest against systematic occupation in Indian-occupied Kashmir. One of the founders, Shakeel Bakshi, is a political activist who advocates natural denied rights in Kashmir—the right of self-determination for the people.
5. Islambad is a colloquial way of referring to the southern district of Islamabad or Anantnag the naming of which has been an ideological contest. By the majority of natives it is referred to as Islambad or Islamabad but in the official records the name was changed back to Anantnag. Anantnag is a Sanskrit word that means ‘infinite springs’ and Islamabad literally means urbanised by Islam Khan. Islam Khan was a governor of Kashmir during Aurangzeb’s reign who built a garden and a village that was sufficient for the name change. Khalid Bashir Ahmed in his book, *Kashmir: Exposing the Myth behind the Narrative*, claims that Ranjitarangi by Kalhana which documents the ancient history does not mention any such garden or village pointing to the fact that Islam Khan did really build these.
6. MUF was a coalition of Islamicate Kashmiri political parties that contested the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly election of 1987 in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The Jamat was the predominant party of the coalition. The coalition won four seats in the assembly and widespread rigging by the ruling National Conference was reported.
7. See Sumit Ganguly, Explaining the Kashmir Insurgency: Political mobilization and Institutional Decay. *International Security*, Vol. 21, Issue 2, 1996.
8. The term Line of Control refers to a ceasefire and military control line between the Indian- and Pakistani-controlled parts of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. It is not a legally recognised international boundary but a de facto border.
9. All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) faction (G) under the aegis of Syed Ali Shah Geelani has eleven executive members and two of them are women representatives of MKM-G Anjum Zamarooda Habib and J&K Mass Movement Patron Fareeda Behanji. J&K Mass Movement is the only organisation comprising of both men and women, headed by a woman leader.
10. See article published in the *New York Times* on 20 May 2011, ‘A New York Jewish Girl Becomes an Islamist’: ‘Jameelah’s parents were dumfounded by her zigzagging fixations and flirtations—first with Holocaust photographs, then Palestinian suffering, then a Zionist youth group and, ultimately, fundamentalist Islam. While her classmates fell happily into “boys, dates, dances,

parties, clothes and film stars,” Jameelah recoiled, refusing to date or form friendships’. Also, in the same article, ‘Assessing her life’s work, Baker criticizes Jameelah for presenting a savage and titillating portrait of America while disclaiming “all responsibility for the crimes” committed by young terrorists who were inspired by her. She also wonders why Jameelah was intent on limiting the role of women to that of wife and mother, a way of life she herself “never managed to live.”’

11. Syed Abul A’la Maududi was born in 1903 in British India. He was a Muslim philosopher, Jurist, journalist and an imam. His works range from Quranic exegesis to Hadith, law, philosophy and history, which are predominantly written in Urdu and have later been translated into many languages. He believed that Islam was essential for politics and believed in a version of Islam that must be revived. He rejected secularism, nationalism and socialism because they were ideologies tied to the Western imperialism. Maududi also rejects the concept of capitalism and socialism. He writes that these western concepts are devoid of the human elements of kindness, equality, brotherhood and justice, which are the basic ingredients of an Islamic society. Maulana Maududi writes that the western ideologies have divided the human race on the basis of caste, creed, religion, language, colour and territorial boundaries. People who adhered to these concepts are referred to as nationals and the rest as aliens. He, therefore, writes that the elements of morality and humanism have no place in these western ideologies. He points out that these manmade concepts are devoid of any spiritual elements. This position has resulted in a deep rooted caste system as in Hinduism, the divide between the black and white in the United States and apartheid in South Africa. All this has resulted in bloodshed and misery for hundreds of thousands across the globe.
12. Jamia masjid is the old grand mosque in Srinagar, Kashmir, built by Sultan Sikandar Shahmiri Kashmiri and follows the Pagoda style of architecture.
13. Red 16 is an infamous torture centre in Kashmir that existed before the breakout of armed insurgency. The centre served as a torture camp during Bakshi Ghulam Mohamad’s rule and most of the Al-Fatah members were lodged here. Oral narratives claim that this house no 16 was unlawfully taken by the government forces from its inhabitants and converted into a torture centre.
14. During September–November 1947, between 70,000 and 500,000 Muslims were massacred in the Jammu region of the princely state Jammu and Kashmir, leading to their mass migration towards West Pakistan. The killings were carried out by extremist Hindus and Sikhs and incited by the Dogra forces of the Dogra Maharaja Hari Singh.
15. Maulana Rasul Shah formed the Anjuman Nusrat ul-Islam (The Society for the Victory of Islam) in 1899 which imparted both modern and Islamic education to the Muslims of Kashmir and influenced their nationalist consciousness in their fight against the Dogra monarchy.

16. Sayed (meaning master or mister) is an honorific title for people who trace direct lineage to the Islamic prophet through his grandsons. However, in its non-Arabic context it has acquired status denomination especially in regions formerly organised through a caste system. They have evolved as social groups that practise strict endogamy.
17. Story of the Pharaoh and his wife Aasiya mentioned in the Quran, Chapter 66. Interview of Aasiyeh Andrabi with the author conducted in June 2013.
18. In 2006 a sex scandal rattled Kashmir's government. When a pornographic CD was handed over to police, they questioned two girls who named Kashmir government's top officials and bureaucrats. About 56 people were accused of involvement, including a local woman named Sabina who admitted her close links with counterinsurgency units in Kashmir. As the scandal came to light, her house was razed and she became a particular target of the wrath from the community. Some of the prominent accused are as follows: former Jammu and Kashmir ministers Ghulam Ahmad Mir and Raman Mattoo, former Border Security Force Inspector General K.S. Padhi, former Additional Advocate General Anil Sethi, former Deputy Superintendent of Police Mohamad Ashraf Mir and former senior IAS officer Iqbal Khandey. The case was handed over to the Central Investigations Bureau and has been ongoing in Chandigarh for the last twelve years. Most of the accused have been acquitted, except for Sabina, who still has to travel to Chandigarh for case hearings. Sabina lives in the outskirts of Srinagar city and faces a severe backlash from the community. During this time, only Dokhtaran have approached her with their counsel and spiritual advice and have taken her into the group.
19. Interviews conducted with Anjum Zamrooda Habib, Yasmin Raja and several other members of MKM by the author in 2013.
20. Interview of Farida Khan conducted by the author in 2013.

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CHAPTER 4

Militarism, Occupation and the New Women's Resistance

Abstract This chapter explores women's subjective experience of a military occupation. Women suffer victimising experiences and find alternative expressions for political dissent without internalising such victimisation. The chapter further unravels the relational agency of young writers, which directly speaks to the feminist notions of liberation. A stronger reassertion of resistance politics after 2008 and a violent state response reinforced many patriarchal beliefs. The public discussion in Kashmir was refocussing on sexual violence as a war tactic. It was argued that street protests were unsafe for women. Although, sexual violence is routinely perpetrated against Kashmiri men too, the bidding was to curtail the supposed extra freedom of women. The protesters adopted new strategies in the wake of escalating violence in the streets. A new generation of Kashmiri women across class, caste, and regional barriers expressed the anguish of living through military occupation.

Keywords Militarism • Violence • Patriarchy • Sexual violence
• Creative resistance • Women writers

The Indian state deployed a stringent counterinsurgency to quell the local armed uprising of Kashmiris and its upshot was an absolute militarisation of Kashmiri society for an indefinite period. The armed Kashmiri

militants were fighting pitched battles with the Indian soldiers and public spaces turned into restricted-access zones one by one. Schools, complexes and cinema halls turned into army bunkers. These strategic battles between the militants and the army transformed the social fabric of Kashmir. The militarisation seeped into the social and political institutions, unveiling the ideological aspects of the war against the Kashmiri people. Seema Kazi in her book, *Between Democracy and Nation: Gender and Militarization in Kashmir*, while quoting Michael Geyer notes, 'militarism embodies the mobilization of resources and people based on the idea of defending a perceived collective'. When such a process takes root, nation-states change gear and instead of engaging in calculated military confrontations for specific goals, they unleash a war over identity. Unlike Western liberal democracies, in postcolonial nation-states, which are carved into oneness through facile borders, the imminent threat arises always from within. The war over identity refashions societies in opposition to a 'mortal enemy', which in the case of India is a Kashmiri. Therefore, an identitarian war against Kashmiris becomes a source of internal national cohesion.

Through an experiment with violent resistance, both Kashmiri nationalists and Islamists figured out that India was interested in a consolidated military occupation of Kashmir. Kashmir was to be claimed as a part of India, with or without the Kashmiri people. The presence of the military increased drastically, which was followed by loss of political rights and the advent of a precarious civilian life for Kashmiri people. This ruptured the nominal claim of a functional democracy in Kashmir. According to the state department, there are between 500,000 and 600,000 Indian soldiers stationed in Kashmir. Repressive colonial-era laws, such as the Armed Forces Special Power Act and the Public Safety Act, further provide impunity to the Indian soldiers.

In the throes of robust militarism, a consciousness was slowly emerging among a new generation of Kashmiris. Their political imagination was shaped by the military occupation and the nature of the war gave rise to the realisation that their religious identity was also under threat. The war had turned more ideological than ever. The armed resistance had failed and the weak political autonomy was eroded further. This left a political void in which the need to try a different method of resistance was articulated. The issues of land rights, of environmental justice and human rights became a new rallying cry to call attention to the 'unfreedoms' experienced by the younger generations. A renewed activism was unearthing issues

and problems emanating from a decade-long militarisation. The year 2008 set into motion a diversified movement, which included issues that were a direct result of continued military occupation.

LIVING UNDER MILITARY OCCUPATION

A robust culture of militarism consolidated into a permanent political occupation generated long term gendered consequences for Kashmiri people. The escalation in militarisation was rapid after a widespread armed struggle broke out in 1989. The incidents of violent death, sexual abuse and enforced disappearances became widespread. Women were entangled in complex political situations and struggled through them creating testimonies on suffering through a military occupation. For a decade or more, such violence has buttressed Kashmiri subjectivity. This subjectivity was hardly accessible through the mediatised narratives of the war in Kashmir. This is especially true of the Indian media where discourses about Kashmir are largely controlled in favour of a national consensus for continued political domination. In the popular Indian political imagination, the continued war in Kashmir is against what were now 'terrorists' and enemy civilians.

The stories of two women, Munavar and Raziya, are testimonies to military occupation and its operations in Kashmir. The narratives of these two women are particularly significant in understanding the subjection to a military occupation and sexuate agency exhibited in resisting such a subjection.

At the age of twenty-one, Munavar married Ashraf, an LPG distributor from her locality, Batmalun.¹ In 1989, Ashraf, like many other men of his generation, joined the armed resistance against the Indian regime in Kashmir. However, a few years later he decided to quit, in order to live a normal life. A year into their marriage, when Munavar was four months pregnant, a crackdown was ordered in their area. Ashraf was killed in a cold-blooded manner in a staged encounter with the Indian Army, an incident the authorities have continued to deny for over twenty years.

Raziya worked as a social worker at a government department. She was married for five years until her life was shaken by the sudden disappearance of her father, Raja Ali Mardan Khan. He was a merchant with no

prominent political involvement. On 16 June 1995, when her father did not return from work, some neighbours informed Raziya of having seen her father getting bundled away in an army jeep on his way home. Since that moment, Raziya's life turned into a relentless struggle of an endless search for her father. It exposed to the torturous and violent side of militarism in Kashmir.

Twenty years after Ashraf's death, during the 2009 popular uprising, a military raid was ordered in the residential area of Batmalun. Munavar was inside her house when a window pane was shattered by the stones pelted by the soldiers of the Indian Army who were retreating from the locality after a day-long curfew. A furious Munavar stepped out of her house alone to confront the soldiers on the streets. She soon gained the support of her neighbours, who also joined her and what started as a confrontation snowballed into a community protest. It is this political agency that Munavar keeps registering through the different experiences she has had with state violence.

Munavar and Raziya's narratives seek the witness of outsiders to ease the burden of their memory. Their narratives bring forth struggles that are hidden from the mediated stories on Kashmir. Their narratives, although similar, are also different in the way they expose the limits of the 'project of citizenship' and the 'limits of subjection'. Their struggles are mired with gendered subjection and converge into the reality of the occupation of Kashmir.

Raziya's frequenting of various jails across India and Kashmir in search of her father already sends her way beyond the orbit she was supposed to traverse. As a woman who had never left her village, she was unacquainted with the vastness of the geographical space and the 'power' of the state machinery. Her life became increasingly vulnerable as she grew out of the folds of protective covers of her family and community. She approached various jail authorities, petty officials, ministers and ministries, all by herself. 'Where is my father?' is the question a resolute Raziya repeatedly asked. This explodes the myth that women brutalised by power internalise victimhood. In her case, she was repeatedly challenging patriarchal norms that demand obedience and shyness from a woman. Her insistence on finding the answer did not just chafe the patriarchy of functionaries but by extension also of the state.

The state retaliated by arresting Raziya on charge of 'supporting' militancy to stop her from asking questions incessantly about her missing father. She was brutally raped and tortured. This exposes the state's fault

lines on 'other' women's bodies. Bodies, which become central in the understanding of resilient people, who do not allow political subjection to form their behaviour or allow the state patriarchy, define a woman's 'place'. In the state's imagination they become prime insurgents not by carrying out an armed rebellion but simply by existing as bodies that refuse to be shaped by the coercion of the state. Early feminist work seemed to suggest that Kashmiri women are often caught between two patriarchies—the state and the militia—relegating them to an identity of victimhood. Through the affective narratives of the body, women dislodge such notions in their day-to-day existence. Raziya braved being a 'defiled' woman once she escaped her perpetrators. Rejection from her husband, community and workplace could not force her into subordination.

My husband said I was an impure woman, and he married someone else. What he thinks of me is laughable because I consider myself a person with upright morals unlike him who on seeing adversity instead of fighting chose an easy path.²

Munavar engaged in her struggle to expose the limits of citizenship, as it exists in Kashmir, by seeking justice in courts and taking her case on the verge of winning. Munavar engages with the system even though she is aware that these systems are designed to discriminate and oppress the people of Kashmir. Despite the toughest struggles and lonely battles, Munavar could prove in the court that her husband was killed in a staged encounter. The people of her locality who were also present at the crackdown testified that her husband was present during the crackdown but was later whisked away along with another man. Unlike Raziya's experiences, Munavar's economic burdens have rested on her father. He has so far supported her family and struggle. Her belief in honour and dignity has helped her survive on very little too, and she believes that leading example has made others, including her lawyer Mian Qayoom, help her. She takes pride in herself for being an example for others and for never giving up. Munavar's case has reached an impasse. Although all seven soldiers have been convicted by the Jammu and Kashmir High Court, an approval from the Ministry of Home Affairs of India is still needed to carry out the sentence. It is most likely that her case will not go past this stage as the immunity provided to army personnel under various laws will ensure the case is transferred to a military court. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act allows the reversal of a conviction. Munavar claims that whenever the pressure to remove this

discriminatory law escalates, staged attacks and fake encounters with the military ensue to keep it in place.

Munavar has invested all her life in this case. She did not remarry so that she would not be distracted from her mission. She is raising her child to be like his father who had strong values and love for human beings. She believes it is a sacrifice she had to make, to make the future just. She does not regret her decisions and life choices. She believes that only through selflessness can we make the world a just place. Munavar is glad that her son is just like his parents; she couldn't be worried about him coming in conflict with the military, which many teenagers in Kashmir do. She believes life and death are in the hands of God and that it is better to die with dignity than to live in slavery. The policies adopted by the Indian government towards Kashmir prove that it is the land which is important to the state, not the life and protection of people. 'If my son upholds the dignity and honour of oppressed people then he is a hero and I would be happy if he is willing to sacrifice himself just like his father', says Munavar.³ Her politics take turns, relying on the traditional ideals of honour and dignity; she imagines a space in which she could transfer her trials and tribulations to her son. Such a political act shows women's ideological positions are not merely shaped by patriarchy but by a consistent struggle to reinterpret traditional ideals and negotiate with them to embolden their own voices.

The act of witnessing is intertwined with the continuation of life in Kashmir, and it is also an archive that ensures resistance as a means of survival. The concept of *shahid* (witness) drawn from the Islamicate conception of *shahadat* (martyrdom), dominates the everyday witnessing of violence in Kashmir. The word *shahid* means 'martyr' and is closely related in its development to the Greek *martyrios* which means being both a witness and a martyr, that is, a person who suffers or dies deliberately for the sake of affirming the truth of a belief system. Although *shahid* in the first sense occurs frequently in the Quran, in the latter sense it appears only once (Al-Imran, 3:141). However, in Kashmir it has taken on newer meanings: A *shahid* does not just testify to the truth of his belief system but testifies to the tyranny or oppression of his or her time, which is a representation of *batil* (falsehood). Witnessing *zulum* (oppression) has become a continual process in which God too is invoked as a witness. In victimising situations under cultures of robust militarism, the expression '*Khoda chu wechan*' (God is witnessing; recording, accounting for a later day of judgement) is frequently used to address the failure or limitations

on part of systems in responding to the rampant injustice. The statement also shows the finality of the state of victimisation (whether accepted as an identity or denied). There are no retributive systems of justice that are functional to address the pandemic lack of justice. In most cases, when death has become so inevitable, evading death is often incorporated into the goals of witnessing. It is easier to die; the act of martyrdom needs people to evade death so that they can testify for a longer time. To witness without being a martyr is a position of burden which requires one to constantly refurbish one's sensory and moral capabilities.

Munavar and Raziya and their reformulation of the meaning of witnessing, is what makes them representative witnesses of the Kashmir violence. Their narratives allow the outsiders mostly arriving into Kashmir from elsewhere to know as if they too are the witnesses. These narratives with their critical detail are memorised by women in the hope that recounting them would finally bring erasure to their trauma. Thus to be an insider is to be a witness who is burdened with excruciating memory. It is not possible to conceptualise a universal ethical position that can respond to the singular instances of violence that make insiders the witnesses. Our set physical locations can regulate our access to information in these postcolonial times, when borders, temporality and context divide our loyalties. The access to information (details of perpetrated violence) that merely satisfies our curiosity to know cannot be considered an ethical involvement. The idea of accessing the violent sites at historical moments becomes an ethical enterprise only when the attempts of gaining access are followed up with the possibility of experiencing vulnerability. Such an understanding allows the 'body', as a site of both performance and subjection, to take a central position in witnessing and experiencing vulnerabilities hitherto inaccessible. The relentless struggles of Kashmiri women survivors point to the actuality of a military occupation, which is characterised by dehumanisation, rampant injustice and sexuate subjection. Women constitute their agency or political action by critically engaging the victimising experiences and rejecting its overarching power of subjugation.

WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE POLITICAL ACTION

After finding themselves visiting courtrooms, police stations and ministries, women find common issues to fight for collectively. One such example of collective women's action against the normalised military culture in Kashmir is the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP). In 1994, Parveena Ahangar's eighteen-year-old son Javed Ahangar went missing after he

was picked up by the Indian Army. She began a relentless search, much like that of Raziya, going from one police station to another, but to no avail. However, she soon discovered women and families experiencing a similar abrupt disappearance of a family member. Parveena gradually organised a movement by setting up meetings and conferences of these women and families in her house or at the homes of other members.

Initially, as a support network, APDP offered a space to its members for helping each other in organising court visits, helping with bus rides and developing cost-effective ways of asking questions about their missing relatives. Over the last twenty years, as cases of enforced disappearances sprang up, the organisation enhanced its role. It invested in recording and profiling these cases. Interns and students from universities were employed by the organisation to create an easily accessible database of the forcibly disappeared people in the state. Apart from the profiling, the members performed mourning protests to remember their loved ones. On the tenth day of every month, members gather in a public park, grieving and remembering their loved ones. United in grief, APDP brings to people's attention the need to keep the search for the forcibly disappeared family members alive and tries to rattle the state-prescribed obscurity about the more than 8000 disappeared people in Kashmir.

Although the activism of APDP rests on the traditional symbol of a 'grieving mother', their politics subverts the very dichotomous public or private distinction of grieving. Through publicising grief they fight back at the state's obscuritising their cause and also visibilise Kashmiri women in a public domain that traditional patriarchy had kept out of bounds for them. Their activism highlights the complexities of the life of 'half-widows' whose legal situation could not be ascertained. The legal status of the marriage of women whose husbands have gone missing was unknown. How long should the wife wait for her missing husband before she decides to remarry? The data from local human rights organisations shows there are more than 1500 half-widows in Kashmir. Recently, religious organisations decreed that the wait period in such cases must be a minimum four years.

The APDP has created an outreach for relatives of the disappeared people handling psychological issues, unemployment and functioning of their families. As justice in most cases remains elusive, APDP have stepped up their international activism by highlighting the enforced disappearances at various global forums. Parveena Ahangar travelled across India, and abroad in many countries where women have faced similar tragedies. Her global activism is acknowledged and she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009. Organisations fighting for prisoners' rights have begun operations on similar lines.

THE RENEWED UPRISING

On 27 May 2008, the Government of India reached an agreement with the state of Jammu and Kashmir to transfer 99 acres of forest land to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board,⁴ a board that takes care of the religious pilgrimage from mainland India to the Amarnath Cave in Kashmir. The decision shocked the Kashmiri people who, already in the throes of a military occupation, felt further threatened about loss of control of land. The transfer of land was a blatant violation of the Article 35-A and Article 370 of the Constitution of India showing how such provisions were routinely violated. It was also a clear indication of the growing power of the right-wing Hindu forces in Kashmir and India. These articles ensure cultural and political autonomy of Kashmir and recognise only the state's subjects as landowners. The transfer of land to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB) is not the first instance of the violation of these article and provision. In this instance, the move was seen by the Kashmiri people as an assault on Kashmiri polity and its control on issues of land and environment and ultimately, interpreted as a blatant disregard for Kashmir's right of self-determination. The order was stayed in the court, on grounds that it violated the Jammu and Kashmir Forest (Conservation) Act of 1997. Over next few years, deliberations took place in various committees and cabinets and by 2008 the government finally approved the land transfer. Over 500,000 people attended a single rally to protest the decision. The initial uprising raised questions about the use of forest land for religious pilgrimage in a fragile ecology. However, these protests were treated with suspicion and increasingly interpreted as Muslims protesting the Hindus. Therefore, the uprising culminated in a demand for ending the political occupation. Then the Hindu majority province of Jammu erupted in a counter protest against the Muslims in the Kashmir valley by imposing a three-month-long economic blockade. The shortage of food, medical supplies and necessities for infants, caused a desperate situation in Kashmir while the resistance continued.

The Amarnath Yatra (pilgrimage) is a recorded legend; the modern state records show that the tradition evolved and changed over time. Historically, during Dogra rule, when the cave shrine was first opened up for pilgrimage, it lasted only for a fortnight. It rose to prominence very recently, initially as a very low-key affair with a scant participation from the local Pandits, and a few thousand pilgrims from India. However, in the last twenty years, it has become a household name in India. In 2000, the SASB was constituted under an Act of the Jammu and Kashmir legislature to manage the affairs of the

pilgrimage. The Chairman of SASB, S.K. Sinha, formerly the Governor of the state, was criticised for extending the period of the pilgrimage, which contradicted the traditional practice. Initially, there was opposition both from the clergy and environmental groups as this extension posed a threat to the fragile ecology of the region. However, diverting the forest land to SASB for creating housing structures for the pilgrims was the actual bone of contention.

The situation was exacerbated by S.K. Sinha's continued communal assertion of his decision and an adamant refusal to reverse it. The SASB functioned parallel to the state government and acquired autonomy by promoting Hindu interests. It became instrumental in changing the scheme of the entire pilgrimage.

In an atmosphere of public angst and a communal response from Jammu, pro-freedom parties rose to the occasion to give a very spontaneous people's movement a strategy and direction. Several women leaders, including Aasiyeh Andrabi, began organising and channelling women's protests. As a response to the government's decision under then Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah, the people's movement was forming a cohesive common agenda. Masarat Alam Bhat, a dynamic new leader emerged from the protest scenes, publishing 'protest calendars' and coining new anti-India slogans. Thousands of people thronged the roads day and night in protest. The slogan of 'Go India, Go Back' fashioned after an anti-colonial Indian slogan against the British Simon Commission—'Go Simon, Go Back'—reverberated in the streets. Homes were shunned for streets and roads where people organised public kitchens, performances and sprang into spontaneous group dances singing songs of freedom. Rural Kashmir sprang into action and organised free distribution of the grains and fruits to Srinagar city to deflate the negative impact of the economic blockade. It was a moment of rediscovery of camaraderie and forging ties involving values of resistance.

In continuation of the militaristic reality of society, the protests met with a high-handed response. Largely peaceful protests were quashed through arbitrary arrests of opposition leaders and unprovoked killings of protesters. In a single incident, fourteen protesters were shot dead by the forces, following a blockade of the trade road between Srinagar and Jammu that prohibited Kashmiri traders from selling their goods. The young population was gradually getting acquainted with the limits of political freedom in Kashmir. The stories of killings of young protesters were stoking memories of more deaths, violence and rape. The incidents that were

either heard about or witnessed in the past, suddenly began to make sense. Young women were now connecting the dots and understanding their own place and limitations under a political occupation. A section of educated women from the middle class began to experiment with the idea of creativity and strategic protests. The notion that streets were no longer safe and that women were sexually assaulted by the armed forces created a gendered response from the young women. The narratives of mass rape survivors in Kunan-Poshpor villages and in Dardpour—the village of widows—were testimonies about gendered nature of war. In the wars over identity, the enemy women are often targeted with sexual violence since the notion of honour is often rested upon women's bodies. In Kashmir, continued military occupation allows for use of rape as a tool of humiliation and men too face unabated sexual violence. This shows that sexual violence is a tactic of war which is deployed to strip honour or emasculate the subject population. The heteropatriarchy of the Indian military establishment had its gendered consequences for Kashmiri women, as society grappled especially with keeping women safe. The new women's uprising had to tread a terrain of threatening violence and social curbs to craft new ways of resistance.

Many of the women grew up through the armed struggle and the political turmoil often forced them to stay indoors. Many of them continued gaining skills and education in a restricted political environment. The educated middle-class women were often told that the streets were unsafe. Many women sought to push back on these prohibitions and reconnected with the political realities of trauma that people dealt with. They put their skills to use by opting for writing down their experiences of war and making sense of memories from childhood years. They wrote poems and painted the grim realities through which they had to suffer. The mass uprising in 2008 offered platforms for reconnection and forming opinions and ideas about the impact of the political situation on women's lives. A series of writings in the English language highlighted the issues of sexual violence, human rights and lack of political space and freedom. In the subsequent years, women writers responded to political events and fought for control over narratives about how Kashmiri women are seen in the popular Indian media. In 2009, the murder and rape of two Shopian women, Aasiya and Neelofer, by Indian soldiers centred the question of women's rights and sexual violence as a weapon of war in Kashmir. The civilian protests for justice in the case were dealt with repression. A legal battle only resulted in reconfirmation of impunity of the Indian Army in Kashmir. This experience was further testament to the bitter realities of

military occupation in Kashmir. Thus, a rejection of the political state culminated into frequent stone-pelting incidents between young teenagers and the army. The army retorted to repressive policies, curbing these incidents through shooting at young teens. In 2010, the murder of a young boy, Tufail Mattoo, solidified people's anger towards normalised death and violence against young boys. The resentment for the state's lawlessness was further affirmed by the Machil encounter case which came to the fore simultaneously. Three boys were offered jobs and taken up to the forests by the Indian soldiers, murdered and presented as militants, in the hope of receiving promotions and rewards from their infantry. This was followed by eight months of protests which saw mass killings, shootings at funerals and an economic blockade to crush the spirits of protesters who resented the normalisation of violent deaths. In response to these protests, more death and violence was offered as a pacification, more than 170 young boys were killed in army action within six months of the movement. During this period Kashmir reeled between strikes and curfews. Women actively began to write about the escalating deaths, casualties and the army's high-handedness. The newly introduced social media came to people's aid as newer ways of resistance were explored. The blockade on news about the state's repression could be fought back and an international response was organised bypassing completely the state's control on narratives of Kashmir war. Women writers articulated responses to the Indian state media narratives, centralising debates about issues of Kashmiri subjectivity.

IDENTITY, CREATIVITY AND REBELLION: WOMEN WRITERS

Women chose writing for various reasons but lack of Kashmiri women's voice in the present political order accentuated this choice in many cases. The mass killings and helplessness experienced during long periods of clampdown created a psychotic disturbance and to make sense of rampant injustice became a passionate engagement. Rafia, a young writer, witnessed the churning of cycles of killings of little boys during 2010, she felt helpless while transitioning through months of confinement to her home. She wrote in anguish about the escalating deaths and expressed feelings of suffering collective humiliation. Her writing questioned the normalisation of death and unfair treatment meted out to Kashmiris by the state forces. Uzma, who by nature is an introvert, grew up with a lot of unprocessed memories and in her writings as a child, she had ignored political issues as the metanarratives around them did not make much sense. However, in the uprising of 2010, many of these riddles were solved. She was

reminded of a bomb blast and scenes of gory violence that had transpired outside her school. The killings in 2010 made her take note of processes through which such deaths were normalised. Her immediate interest in journalism was shaped by these compelling political realities. She travelled to different areas and covered issues and stories about women's suffering, trauma and violence that were deliberately left unexplored by the Indian media. Sabia, a young reporter at a local daily newspaper chose to write about women's reproductive health only to find deep linkages between the political environment and women's health. As her story about women's reproductive health developed further, it unravelled connections between reproductive health, psychological health and political violence. She met many psychiatrists who affirmed her findings. She went on to cover other issues like drug abuse and children's issues, and everything she reported on brought her to recognise the overarching influence of political violence on overall well-being of the people. As a writer interested in women's rights, she was forced to conclude that only through demanding an end to the occupation could the question of women's rights be fully addressed. This shift in her thinking convinced her to proactively pursue political stories. She struggled to convince the publication she worked for, and also her family, that as a woman she too could cover political stories and issues. She finally embraced writing about political issues and wrote about an accomplished poet whose son had become a militant in early 1990s and who was killed in a fight against the state. She was affected by the poet's ordeal and how he was only left with the option of exiling himself in order to remain safe. Writing about the poet, Sabia contemplated on the political situation in Kashmir where its best minds were either punished or banished.

As the siege continued, Uzma covered protests in Palhalan, which was hugely impacted by the army repression. She was overwhelmed by witnessing the extent of violence and injustice meted out to people in Palhalan. Instead of writing a report about the event, she wrote a long poem expressing her anguish about the lack of justice. An immersion into everyday experiences of violence changed the focus of her writing drastically. Once, as she peeped from her window, she witnessed Sameer Rah's⁵ funeral procession, it transformed her as she argues:

Window is central to a woman's worldview in Kashmir. Women busy with chores, take quick peeks from closeby windows to grasp pieces of world as it unfolds everyday. I peered out through the window and saw a procession coming through into our lane. The coffin was small and holding tears became difficult and I cried while my elder brother pacified me. A unique

urge moved me, I ran down to the kitchen, put on a hijab and told my mother that I was joining the procession.⁶

Uzma's anecdote questions the duality often proposed in different forms of resistance where the non-violent means are seen as exclusive and oppositional to other forms of resistance. The convergence between a lived experience, witnessing and memory complicates the simplistic moral hierarchies in the forms of resistance. The faculties of affect, rationality and agency are often predisposed to the history of a particular subjection. Uzma's inconsolable sense of loss after witnessing injustice in Palhalan, or joining Sameer's funeral, and Sabia's reflections about a poet's desolate life and women's sexual health point to how injustice as a norm becomes a collective inheritance. The collectivity consolidated through a common of trauma offers a robust cohesion to a community, informing its resistance ethics. Like Uzma, when Fancy Jaan, a young woman, was peering out of the window, she was met by her death. Her curiosity to view a duel ensuing between stone-pelting protesters and the Indian Army made her a target of a bullet directly fired at her by a soldier. Uzma could relate to Fancy Jaan for their similar act of peeking through a window which is so central to women's lives in Kashmir. Immediately, Uzma and her mother joined Fancy's funeral procession which was incessantly fired upon by soldiers. The funeral procession offered women mourners a community and a release where they could demand change. In 2010, writing became an extension of street protests and a single link between experiences of trauma, violence and memory consolidating a comprehensive resistance. Thus, collectively many women writers broke the siege by taking control of the narratives of Kashmiri politics.

REFASHIONING IDENTITY

Unlike women's experiences of religious identity in the 1980s, the new generation are increasingly finding themselves untangling a political web of ignorance and intolerance. While statist modernity is imposed from top down, the communalisation of politics has made the question of religious identity a difficult one. Since 9/11, rising global Islamophobia has played out in the foreground of a robust revival of Islam. Many women have tried to find a comfortable place between two alienating political ideologies, picking and choosing from the best of Western modernity and Islam. In jeans and hijabs, the young Muslim Kashmiri writers carve out a new synthesis of supposedly contrarian forces. They

respond to a peculiar form of Islamophobia emanating in India which is both historical and systematic in the Kashmiri context.

The imposing nature of the postcolonial modernity as seen in women with religious backgrounds creates a miasma of confusion about women's rights. In the Kashmiri context, religious women often struggle with finding successful religion-observing Muslim women in journalism. Aasifa, a devout Muslim woman, struggled to push away Indian liberal discourses about Muslim women. While her conservative dress is a primary debate, she finds the question of the Muslim veil irrelevant. There is no connection between dress, ability and intelligence. The forces that wish to forcibly unveil or veil women are the same patriarchal forces that deny women control over their lives.

Religiously observant women find themselves grappling with the imposition of corporate modernity in journalism circles, which also shows in their reports from Kashmir. The statist Indian media circulates a scripted narrative about Kashmir, presenting it as an exotic, beautiful place infested by 'Islamism', while conveniently pushing the human rights violations under the carpet. Indian media imports Islamophobic analysis and plasters it over the political landscape of Kashmir, generating global solidarity for itself as a victim of terrorism. Therefore, absolving itself of every responsibility it has towards Kashmiri people. The media regularly refers to Kashmiris as terrorists and the general Indian public consumes this rhetoric on an everyday basis.⁷

Many women were born in secular Muslim families and were not very religious; they were forced to educate themselves about Islam due to their experiences in mainstream journalism cultures in India. As professionals from Kashmir, they found themselves answering a volley of questions about Islam even though they were not interested in religion. Such an experience in the corporatised Indian culture often forced them to either turn more religious or keep deliberating the humanistic aspects of their faith. Their identities as professionals were often contentious because they were primarily seen as emblems of Islamic faith or culture and not as journalists. Many women became more committed to writing about diverse issues and pushed back against the forces trying to visualise them as experts of religion or ideology alone. They became suspicious of such an imposition and understood the dangers of being typecast as such.

The discrimination, ignorance and hatred encountered in these spaces impacted women's self-perceptions and reshaped their identity and politics. Many actively invested in projects to educate their colleagues and friends about the political issues in Kashmir. The need to generate awareness about

Kashmiris, Muslims and women in general became one of the goals of their writing. Isma, a journalist working in a news organisation based in New Delhi, encountered discrimination and hate that reshaped her ideas about religion and religious practice. At first she tried to reason with her colleagues but she realised it was futile because there was so much misinformation about Muslims. She decided to write about these experiences because writing offered her a non-threatening space in which she would not be judged or interrupted while expressing her ideas.

Women also developed different responses to experiences of discrimination. Moeza argues that it is irrelevant what people think about Islam as it is a broad set of ideas that can have varied meanings. She reveres her personal learning and transformation from these ideas, for ideas that do not stand the test of time become obsolete and perish. Islam continues to inspire millions of people and has stood the test of time. It is a way of living that contains messages of humanity, tolerance and justice. It is not important to defend Islam because if Islam is good, it will show in its followers. Therefore, Moeza focusses on living the moral lessons taught in the Quran. She believes that as a journalist, reporting truth even if it goes against her, her family or community, is a fundamental lesson from Islam. Only by embodying these values could one defend one's beliefs or faith. Islam is true because it allows for a person's transformation on a moral plane and not because it can be proved metaphysically, scientifically or historically. It is only through the application of these codes in a person's life that the true sense of its morality could be realised.

Traditional Muslim societies are not purely formed by religious codes and directives. Although limited, women find ways to explore their agency and choices. In traditional societies, gender itself is constructed with certain constitutive powers. In Kashmir, women face restrictions on doing certain things while men are also limited by the constitutive power of their gender. Many women think feminism does not account for these social realities of Muslim women. This often makes feminism irrelevant because no tools are employed to gauge these realities impacting Muslim women. Additionally, militarism challenges these gendered roles and transforms them so that they can respond to the crisis of a political situation. Women often realign these roles as per their need. Uzma once visited a family of seven women who dressed one of their sisters as a boy so that she could navigate the patriarchal and militaristic public sphere. Uzma witnessed the constitutive influence of gender roles in her own mother. She reflects on an incident that took place during a search

operation in her locality. When soldiers of the Indian Army tried to enter their house, her mother ordered them to remove their shoes (a practice followed in Kashmir) after which the soldiers decided not to enter the house. This incident impacted young Uzma and she recognised her mother's courage. Likewise, in traditional societies women fight back and employ ideals and virtues that form the collective fabric of society.

The complications arising from traditional ideals show even more so when certain ideas are deployed to understand women regularly as if they are only cultural repositories. Under straining political conditions, the threat of sexual violence and death looms large but often certain threats are gendered. In Kashmiri society, women are considered weak and in need of male protection, in the absence of which they might become victims to targeted sexual violence. This assumption has serious consequences for women's liberty and freedom. However, fighting these myths amounts to making oneself further vulnerable under a military occupation. Moeza explains that women as humans do not endanger themselves even when they have the capability to defend themselves just to prove a point. A struggle for women's rights is a strategic struggle in which women's self-growth, security and freedom must be balanced.

Women writers argue that their choice to go into journalism was resented by their parents. However, under militarised social conditions the reasons behind the oppositions faced by women are complicated. Do they face these oppositions because of their gender, or because journalism in Kashmir is dangerous? (Which without doubt it is.) The most important rejoinder that women writers are making to the idea of patriarchy is in understanding how it modifies and works in the militarised traditional society of Kashmir. The experiences of patriarchy are emboldened when the gun-wielding soldiers are given the power to demand anything from women and abuse them. When Uzma was still in school she was frisked by a soldier who demanded that she give him her lunch tiffin. She mustered courage and refused to give it to him. She remembers the incident as a point in her life when she understood masculine militaristic patriarchy and her own courage to defend herself. The women writers' lives are further complicated by their politics. When women write to resist these forces, it has a direct relation with the dynamics of family politics. Abida's writings angered her father who served as a bureaucrat in the Kashmir government in 2008. He pressurised her to stop writing about political issues. His job at a political office was jeopardised by the writings of his daughter. However, Abida was steadfast with no regrets. Under a military occupation, the gender identities are further complicated by one's political opinions and ideas.

The complexity of identities under a military occupation is further palpable when women insist on formulating political opinions about Kashmir's right of self-determination. In a dangerous mix of traditional and militaristic ideas, politics is linked to masculinity. In journalistic circles, women journalists are not encouraged to cover politics and are often asked to focus on 'softer' issues like culture, gender and society. Moeza's boss rebuked her when she expressed a wish to do a political story. He categorically told her that it was a man's job to report on politics. In this sense, the resistance gives women a space to challenge male domination as well as the heteropatriarchy of the militaristic culture. Women writers battle complex forces of patriarchy at home, in their workplaces and in the public sphere. In daunting political conditions, the demarcation of these spaces is blurred. Homes often turn into workplaces when the military enters people's private spaces. The thinking that militarism is outside of private lives is a problematic proposition as realities blur the distinction between 'public' and 'private', which is otherwise an important focal point in feminist thinking.

Thus, the work of women writers ruptures the alliance of patriarchal forces to control their lives. They employ a multi-pronged strategy to fight for their space and voice. They fight several battles of identity and use strategic means to prioritise these fights. Aasifa thinks that her priority is to write while fighting all these battles is exhausting. The society expects women to give up their careers and focus instead on their roles as wives and mothers. Such expectations are taxing for creative women who have the potential to change the society for better. At some level, society is not willing to accept women beyond their reproductive roles. Even if their own family supports their careers, after marriage they often face tremendous opposition.

Uzma's critique of both patriarchy and militarism distanced her from the mainstream and she worked in alternative spaces of resistance. In these alternative media organisations, a critical approach was encouraged. She worked alongside male journalists and found support for covering political issues. She argues that progressive and visionary alternate spaces exist but they cannot develop because of constantly being under threat. She focussed on stories of women challenging the gendered nature of military masculinity. Cultural patriarchy seemed benign and harmless when compared to the impact of militarisation on women's lives. If a choice was to be made between an oppressive family and a violent military culture, women often chose their families. Uzma, through an extensive engagement with the field, concluded that patriarchy isn't an exclusive problem of Islam or a Muslims. It is a

social problem in all societies and must be abolished through a struggle from within. The question of identity is a complex one for young women writers and they have different approaches for addressing this issue.

POLITICS OF RESISTANCE WRITING

The context within which writing in English shapes the discourses of freedom and rights is complex. After the Dogras changed the state language from Persian to Urdu, much of Kashmir's past was inaccessible except to a learned few. However, a robust middle class has challenged the linguistic hierarchies only to the detriment of the indigenous language of Kashmiris—Koshur. The new generation of writers choose English as their medium of communication to respond to the political onslaught and narratives about it, emanating from the Indian media further creating strong hierarchies in the militarised Kashmiri society. Even though one manages to manoeuvre through the messy linguistic political landscape of Kashmir, writing is a dangerous endeavour as it attempts to talk back to and talk over the institutional control of power. Being a writer in unfavourable political conditions is to stand against the tide of time, and gender can further exacerbate vulnerability.

In the phase of non-violent resistance between 2008 and 2010, the work produced by young women generated the meaning of self-constitution in relation to their context. Many respondents report their work as being deeply political in a situation like Kashmir. Whether they acknowledge the political nature of their work or not, it is the context that imparts meaning to their work, which only attempts to provide a description and an alternative perception. Thus, their work is directly pitched against state propaganda and misinformation. It also strengthens the knowledge about the existing freedom movement. Uzma thinks that in a situation of military occupation everything that the oppressed do becomes a political act. Simple bodily gestures can connote political choices in a restricted space. If one is holding a *Kangir* (traditional coal brazier) inside the *Pheran* (cloak) and walking down the road doing one's usual business, it could make a soldier suspicious and get one arrested or even shot dead. Therefore, the meaning is so context-specific that everything that is done as a writer is subject to political scrutiny. In Kashmir, the word 'politics' has a negative connotation. It is something that corrupt politicians do to support the military control and elections that are unrepresentative of the political problem. In such an atmosphere, there is a need to reconstruct the meaning of politics in the freedom struggle.

Rafia writes to fill a void which is left by the lack of Kashmiri perspective on the international stage. The world thinks of Kashmir as a land disputed between India and Pakistan. This is demeaning to the struggle that Kashmiris have put forth for the last 60 years. Kashmir is not a mere territory; it is inhabited with people affected by violence and their voices should matter. Owing to this fact, Rafia believes Kashmiris should write; it doesn't matter if the opinions are repetitive and monotonous. The goal should be to create a space for an indigenous national narrative and imagination. This undiluted Kashmiri opinion has little importance in international media circles, but it acts as a platform of interaction for Kashmiri people. There is a manageable collective political expression in their writing. Abida feels her work is not political in the sense that it does not cater to any ideology, and does not fixate on notions that foster only certain political interests. Her ideology is to stay committed to highlighting people's issues and problems. If people demand freedom, it is imperative that her writing focusses on these demands, and their history and genesis. Her writing is a medium of expressing the hope, dreams, despair, frustrations, anger and resentment of the people.

Isma elucidates the political nature of her work through a story from Kashmir that became a point of interest for the Indian media. A girl's music band named Pragash received threats from some people (not much is known about them except they were not significant) on their Facebook page. Considering the issue of women's rights, it was a story waiting to be told. It stirred a heated discussion in the social media and Kashmir was again projected as a conservative place with Muslim women as victims. Isma contacted the band, and they chose not to speak about the issue. Pragash has never consented for the media story that blew up in such a dramatic way, they informed Isma. As a woman, Isma identified with insecurities that the girl band must have felt and respected their choice to not speak to the media. Through this small anecdote, Isma articulates the way in which Muslim Kashmiri women become fodder for media controversies that deny them any say in the issues that threaten them. The politics in presenting Muslim Kashmiri women as exclusive victims of Islam is obvious in this case. Therefore, alternative political spaces that respect women's voices is essential. Moeza considers her work as primarily political since it attempts to bring out ignored and repressed voices and helps build solidarity with other marginalised peoples in South Asia. Her travels in India made her realise that oppression is everywhere and that a way to connect the experiences of people was needed. She wrote stories

about the tribal people in central India and their suffering under brutal and repressive state policies. These experiences validate Kashmiri experiences and offer a new window onto the politics of the world as they continue to grapple with seclusion.

Aliya thinks that in a war-like situation, the truth often becomes the first causality, and Prophet Mohamad taught, 'The highest form of *Jihad* [struggle] is to speak truth in front of an unjust ruler'. Therefore, when she published an article about women with the picture of a station house officer snatching a woman's veil, she became a target and was hounded for days by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Her awareness of her work's political nature makes her confident that in our times the value of journalistic ethics is huge in resisting oppression. The judicial system under the Indian regime is incapable of delivering justice to Kashmiri people. Traditional and religious systems are the only recourse in the wake of the large-scale abuse of rights, violence and war. Hence, the idealism of Islamic philosophy is preferred over the endless visits to police stations, courtrooms and jails in search of justice.

Religious inspiration strengthens the role of memory as recourse against casual forgetting of the violations committed against people. Memory becomes a fundamental weapon in the hands of the oppressed people while propaganda is strengthened by the state. According to the Kashmiri Muslim women writers, writing works complementarily with the struggles experienced by the common people on an everyday basis. Although non-violent ways are better and they uphold these values, it is the sacrifices made with blood that make the discussions relevant. As for writing, to write about similar humiliating experiences has allowed them to form collective resonances, which challenge the means in place that sabotage people's experiences. Today's world is so interconnected that over the Internet, Moeza found her writings were translated and published in a Tibetan magazine. Her writing had resonated with the people of Tibet as they are battling a similar situation in China. Forging solidarity with communities under political struggles elsewhere in the world has strengthened their beliefs to take the mission of freedom further ahead. The writers, through their creativity, are focussing on the strengths of women and the ways in which they empower themselves as opposed to the narratives of victimhood that plague the question of Muslim women globally.

Journalistic writing opened up many problematic contours of living in Kashmir. Aasifa began to understand the problem as a lack of historical understanding in younger generations. The textbooks do not record the

history of Kashmir. Although children are taught about the Mughal rulers or the Taj Mahal, they are significantly unaware of their own history. She observed that only sometimes passing references were made to Kashmir's history, often in the form of contested narratives. The official textbooks were completely silent on Kashmir. Aasifa wrote an article about the pressing need to educate the younger generation about their history and necessity of including it in the curriculum. It was a momentary realisation that to have her opinions heard through writing was an important aspect of her identity. The idea for writing about the absence of historical understanding of Kashmir emanated from discussions with her siblings, who displayed the utmost ignorance about their indigenous history while being au fait with the histories of India or Pakistan. They were aware of the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre of Sikhs at the hands of the British but knew nothing about the massacre that was carried out on 13 July 1931 under the Dogra rule of Kashmir. They were unaware about Maqbool Bhat but they very well knew about Bhagat Singh. This blackout of indigenous history and an attempt to bring the discourses of Indian nationalism to the people of Kashmir to create false identities is detrimental to Kashmir, which Aasifa believes can be fought only through writing. Soon after her article was published it generated a tremendous impact on the local government authorities. Although the local authorities engaged in tokenism by introducing histories of spiritual poetesses such as Lale Ded and Habbe Khatoon, and providing rejoinders to the cultural aspects of the Dogra rule, they negated much of Kashmir's political history. Nevertheless, a visible impact was generated through the questions she raised in her writings.

In 2010, as the street violence escalated, Uzma felt an immense urge to retrieve the stories of women's suffering, which could challenge the forcing sustained on women's vulnerability. Uzma understands her subjectivity in a unique manner and treats writing both as a means of expression and a way of providing certain consolation to the 'self', which is a witness to all the injustices.

Once on a bus, while Uzma was back from work, near Naveut, she witnessed women battling with soldiers for the release of a man. She grew curious and got off the bus to listen closely the disagreements that were emanating from the scene. The women were angry and pelted stones at the army vehicles. They informed Uzma of their helplessness in managing to get their only brother released from the army. There were about seven of them including their mother, and their youngest brother was their only breadwinner. He was just fourteen and his crime was pelting stones.

This event perturbed Uzma so much that it took her days to come to terms with extreme vulnerabilities of women battling military regime. After a few days she penned it down and after it was published, only days later she received a phone call from the family informing about their brother's release. The incident reassured Uzma about the need to empathise and address issues that ordinary women faced, and that she could bring respite to them, even if temporarily. It also made her challenge the mistrust and suspicion that is breaking the community down.

During Isma's time in Delhi University, she became aware of her gender much more than while she was in Kashmir. She was often asked questions about Islam's oppression on women. People's opinions about Islam are based on misinformation and she could not convince everyone and rather focussed on her priorities and preferences. Isma believes that it is the personal autonomy and willingness to struggle and curiosity to know, that forms the spirit of life. The experiences of dealing with judgemental attitudes and negative information about Islam led her to understand religion in a more thorough way. She discovered that Islam offers ideas of liberation which traditional Muslim preachers do not explore. The newly educated women were exploring these ideas and deploying them as tools of resistance.

Writing enabled them to expose faultlines inside Kashmir's social polity, as the divisions between pro-state and pro-freedom people got emboldened during the fresh protests since 2008. For Abida, her bureaucratic family forced her to keep a distance from the everyday political turmoil. She was surrounded by men in uniform even outside the gate of her own house. She went to school in a police gypsy, with security guards for her protection. Just like the entire city, her house too was surrounded by barricades and concertina wires and she felt these unfreedoms deeply.

Abida explored her need for freedom and liberty through the art of writing. In 2008, she went to Delhi for higher studies and in the same year a massive public uprising against Indian rule escalated. Abida found herself defending the people of Kashmir and acting as a spokesperson for the Kashmiri nation. This role was carved out for her in a very awkward situation in which every question about the agitation, subsequent elections, about the conflict was posed to her as if she was the one at the helm of the affairs. Every question posed by classmates and professors, and every answer she gave, raised several other questions deep inside Abida's mind. It was an initiation of an internal moral war. The situation as Abida describes it was a perpetual existential crisis. She could not relate to anyone there and no one could understand the anger that seethed inside her. Everyone thought that she

was rude. She started writing about how she felt because that seemed the only way of resistance. This was the time she finally came to terms with her immediate reality and the realities of the conflict. Bomb blasts, firing, crack-downs and frequent exposure to humiliation were suddenly resurrected in her memory. She felt it was necessary to craft a language that could represent the people and strengthen the demand for freedom.

The witnessing of the 2008–2010 protests resulted in a change of perspectives. A Kashmiri person's modern language to explain the situation was laden with the political propaganda of the Indian state. The newspapers demanded that Indian police be referred to as 'security' forces even when they were killing and brutalising common Kashmiri people at will.

When Isma returned to Kashmir after completing her studies in New Delhi, she joined a local newspaper named *Kashmir Times* and started working enthusiastically. After some time she realised that her perceptions of the political perspectives were very topical. She had read and followed the mass uprising in 2008 by following the reports of Indian newspapers and believed that Kashmiri people were exaggerating the facts and that Kashmir was in fact moving towards normalcy. She understands how, to an outsider, it can certainly seem so and how many curtains remain between Kashmir and rest of the world. After the 2008 uprising, Isma made many trips to the valley and observed a superficial calm. She even visited the highly popularised tourist attraction, Tulip Garden, on the day of its inauguration (signifying participation in the governmental propaganda of peace through tourism). Even though she was a Kashmiri she began to compare the situation in Kashmir with the situation in the other states in India. She realised that she had internalised much of the propaganda against Kashmiri people, which was heavily peppered by colonial projections of natives who were unworthy of truth and that it was Kashmiris who preferred 'isolation' over free and fair Indian 'democracy'.

Isma explains her views on Kashmir both as a journalist and a Kashmiri who lived and studied in different parts of India. However, when she joined the *Kashmir Times*, as a fresher she had expected to get all sorts of rubbish page-three assignments or making press notes. When the 2010 uprising began, the situation was tense. Many people could not come to the office and if anyone would manage to come in, that person had to do all the work. Luckily she lived in the upper town and it was easier for her to commute to the office and work on real issues. She was a fresher who had joined just three months ago and she found herself exposed to the day-to-day happenings in Kashmir. Her editor asked her to meet a lot of families whose

sons and daughters had been shot dead by the army. She was asked to focus on women-centric stories and slowly what she terms as her 'bubble' started to fall apart as she saw the real suffering of the people of Kashmir. The killings of school children and teenage boys increased steadily. Stories were piling up and nothing was moving and she took it as a challenge; everything was changing. It was a complete shift in her thinking and her political understanding. Now, everything was under her scrutiny and she did not depend on the secondary 'jingoistic' opinions as sources, which is what she encountered on regular basis in her former office at an Indian newspaper.

Isma realised that proximity to the context, or experiencing the context first-hand, had impacted her understanding of issues of the Kashmiri people tremendously. Field space dismantles all apolitical and misinformed ideas that we uphold through propaganda or otherwise. This experience had such a bearing on her that it impacted her writing completely. Narratives of people's experiences and police versions too were thrown into her writing, but she felt she had, finally, witnessed the truth.

Isma was often labelled emotional but she did not agree. In her opinion it was about values of collective humanity and empathy. She once did a story on an entire locality of Zaena Kedal that suffered during the protests. She met many families with dead and injured members. Similarly, for Rafia, writing and witnessing the deaths of her near and known friends and colleagues at the hands of Indian soldiers was interlinked to interrogating her own values consistently; it was a humbling experience. Writing is essentially a tool of protest through which she attempted to record the trials and tribulations of many people, friends and colleagues who were tortured and killed. Through Facebook, social networking and blogging she could challenge the disturbing normalisation of such deaths and try to begin a conversation about them.

From 2008 to 2010, new wave of resistance writing consolidated a narrative of resistance while shaping more vocal Kashmiri Muslim women. Born and raised amidst a violent environment, fighting its normalisation, in these years women reconnected the history, memory and violent subjection to abnormality of living through a military occupation. They started raising questions and concerns about oppression and the politics of oppression. It was a generation otherwise, to some extent, shielded from the outside violent situation and also limited by it. Familial restrictions ensured women's safety as escalated militarism continued to be detrimental to the lives of the new generation. These years of civilian resistance hence led to

an opening of a certain window into the political situation in Kashmir and recounting of an intergenerational trauma.

Female journalists have closely observed violent situations. For Aliya, reporting facts objectively about the suffering of the Kashmiri people is a cause she is dedicated to and does not mind incurring any kind of problems for the achievement of such a goal. As long as you are reporting the truth, it does not matter which agency you are taking head-on. Many respondents termed this phase as their rebirth, which involved a lot of pain but gave life to their stronger resisting selves. It also embodied strangeness, suddenly feeling alien in your own place. Such was the pain of rebirth that all the cocoons woven around oneself for protection fell apart. A lot of them did not explore the city; they could not know places and spaces because of the restrictions imposed by the military occupation in which they were raised. Their lives have oscillated between school and home and, in these years, they suddenly found themselves at the frontline of a war against the Indian state. It was a period of realisation despite the shortcomings of the people and the pessimism generated by the perennial occupation and political restraint. The only way to live with dignity was through resistance. Many respondents linked their political positions with the ordainments of the Islamic faith and obligations such as ‘struggle against those who oppress people’.

Abida’s work with a leading news agency in India provided a window into the lack of space for the Kashmir discussion in the mainstream media. Even though the organisation was a private corporation, it worked like a mouthpiece of the government on the Kashmir issue. This was the time when she wasn’t reporting from Kashmir but editing stories from the region. These news stories arriving from Kashmir were simply discarded because they were critical of the Indian state. Whether they were based on objective research or not didn’t matter. She was particularly asked to remove the anti-India statements from the story even when they were a reflection of the public opinion. Not only was the truth concealed but gross lies were presented as facts. One of the headlines that she still remembers is ‘Youth are pelting stones in return of drugs from Afghanistan’. It was filed by the chief reporter. To continue working there, Abida made sure never to accept assignments from Kashmir as she would not be able to lie in the reports. After such experiences at work and disagreements with her father, it was clear to Abida that she was always going to be at loggerheads with her bureaucratic family and her political opinion is the reason she continues to face many hurdles.

Breaking away from tradition and doing something innovative is always difficult, but if one chooses to go against the tide, one must set an example, argues Aasifa. Her religiously conservative family is willing to learn and grow with her over time only because she has acted upon traditional values of patience, perseverance and respect. They are content that Aasifa will uphold their family values and it will reflect in her work as well. Through writing, many respondents experienced growth in personal autonomy and developed enhanced political understanding as positive outcomes of the process. Many of them engaged in public speaking initiating intellectual debates about the future of the struggle for freedom. For some, objective journalism became a tool for bringing international attention to the problems on the ground in Kashmir. The sense of independence for many grew drastically as they frequently travelled to research new issues. Many respondents saw a direct impact of their political career in their personal lives too. They were more responsible towards issues on a personal front. Over time, the art of balancing was learned by many objective journalists. The political outcome of writing on the personal front was to bring self-consolation by voicing repressed opinions and concerns for freedom.

Aliya's first piece on Kashmir was published online and received international attention. The extent of militarisation and human rights violations in Kashmir that she wrote about surprised many of her readers internationally. Her writing exposed the deeply colonial politics of the Indian state in Kashmir. She felt lifting the lid from such abominations of the Indian state gave a sense of achievement to her and reprieve to the people suffering for years. The new forms of resistance put forth by Muslim Kashmiri women against the Indian state and domestic patriarchy, shows women as political actors fashioning and recrafting resistance politics in favour of women's rights and larger political freedoms of the people of Kashmir.

NOTES

1. Batmalun or Batamaloo is a locality in Srinagar.
2. Interview conducted by the author in Varmul, 2013.
3. Interview conducted by the author in Batmalun, 2013.
4. In 2000, while the state was battling the armed insurgency, the state assembly constituted the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB) to manage the affairs of Hindu pilgrims visiting from all over India.

5. Sameer Rah was a nine-year-old boy killed by the Indian troopers during the street protests in 2010. His martyrdom had an emotional value for the people of Kashmir. According to his parents, Sameer Rah had left home to buy a candy amidst the imposed curfew. The responding multiple police versions were too conflicting to establish anything. He was beaten up severely and a stick was forcefully pushed down his throat which ultimately resulted in his death.
6. Interview conducted by the author in Lalchowk, 2013.
7. Interview conducted by the author in Lalchowk, 2013.

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CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Abstract This chapter concludes an understanding of Muslim Kashmiri women by focussing on the question of their agency in the historical resistance movement to the Indian rule. It shows that women are not merely accidental victims and they choose to operate within struggles of self-determination in Kashmir in order to register their political agency and fight for their rights. Women are persistent in their fight against the injustice of the state and the excesses of the social patriarchy. By focussing on women's context-specific political action, the chapter shows women's effective struggles against patriarchy are at the heart of a complex resistance. The experience of victimisation often stimulates women to take control and direct their lives into struggles pressing for change. It is only by engaging in political actions that they come to realise the lack of freedoms and injustice in Kashmir. Despite experiencing these isolating political conditions, women do not accept or internalise their own supposed inferiority. Instead, they have challenged the patriarchal militarisation and social patriarchal subjugation (to uphold women's rights and the cause of freedom).

Keywords Victims • Agents • Kashmiri • Muslim • Women
• Occupation • Militarism

The discourses on Muslim women are consistently shaped by inquiries into their position within Islam, particularly in connection to the Shariah law.

As a result, the dominant view about Muslim women considers them as perennial victims of an exclusive religious patriarchy. The view gets further complicated when the question of Muslim women is investigated in prolonged conflict situations. The victim image plastered over Muslim women becomes even more perpetual when they are reduced to neat cultural icons or preservers of culture instead of historical agents. Some of the interventionist feminist work carried out by Indian feminists about the condition of Muslim women in Kashmir is also replete with the rhetoric of victimhood. The few works that attempt to locate a more agential Muslim woman relegate political action to social or pro-statist function alone. The inquiry into the political agency of Kashmiri Muslim women protestors has remained limited, thus far.

This chapter concludes an understanding of Muslim Kashmiri women by focussing on the question of their agency in the historical resistance movement to the Indian rule. It shows that women are not merely accidental victims and they choose to operate within struggles of self-determination in Kashmir in order to register their political agency and fight for their rights. Women are persistent in their fight against the injustice of the state and the excesses of the social patriarchy. By focussing on women's context-specific political action, the chapter shows women's effective struggles against patriarchy are at the heart of a complex resistance. The experience of victimisation often stimulates women to take control and direct their lives into struggles pressing for change. It is only by engaging in political actions that they come to realise the lack of freedoms and injustice in Kashmir. Despite experiencing these isolating political conditions, women do not accept or internalise their own supposed inferiority. Instead, they have challenged the patriarchal militarisation and social patriarchal subjugation (to uphold women's rights and the cause of freedom).

The history of resistance politics as depicted through women's narratives further shows that modern Kashmiri political consciousness from the very start is an alternate consciousness that has survived the political repression. This recurring consciousness forms the basis of resistance politics, and women have in creative ways engaged with it and tried to recreate, realign and readjust its political goals from time to time, to create more pro-women spaces in it. The lens of these pro-women spaces is adjusted to analyse both the movement and the state structure. In different phases of the movement, women's narratives provide accounts of self-constitution and an enigmatic review of the world of resistance politics. With meticulous detail, women unpack the complex political landscape of Kashmir.

In the first phase of Plebiscite Front protests, the left-orientated Kashmiri nationalist discourses of self-determination had foundational significance for the supposedly 'Islamism'-dominated resistance struggle in Kashmir. However, class formation was deflecting the early Kashmiri nationalist movement from achieving its goals. Upper-class women found an opportunity to enter the public sphere when the need to consolidate a national self-determination demand emerged. The Kashmiri national demand had its roots in anti-Dogra resistance politics of Kashmir, and its actualisation was thwarted and co-opted by the dominating Indian (state) nationalism. By the 1950s, the troubled relationship between the Kashmiri nationalists and the Indian state came to fore. The upper-caste dissident Kashmiri nationalists contemplated the idea of recruiting Kashmiri women into the movement for the demand of Plebiscite. This entry into politics was new for upper-class women but not for ordinary Kashmiri women who had a long history of resistance against oppressive policies of the former Dogra forces. Kashmiri leaders like Mirza Afzal Beigh, Sofi Mohamad Akbar, Attaulla Soharwardy, Munshi Ishaq and Akbar Jehan formed the Plebiscite Front on 9 August 1955. Akbar Jehan's entry into the front also paved the way for other women relatives of the nationalist leaders. These women experienced a sharp division between their public and political lives. They were expected to balance out their domestic and public roles. To be a remarkable mother or wife preceded their role as a politician. The balancing acts that women performed between traditional and modern political roles were experiences unique to the upper-class women. For cadre women, such distinctions hardly existed. They worked from their domestic budgets for the movement and often got jail terms that disrupted their regular domestic lives. In this mass-based politicisation, unlettered women were birthing a parallel culture of dissonance. Many women recall the cultural imperialism (the seeds of which were sown at the turn of the century) came along with the modern nationalist movement—their Kashmiri consciousness was now pitted against the subcontinental modernity. Such modernity was epitomised by 'Indian subcontinental culture', where *shalwar Kameez* (tunic/pants) was not simply a dress but an alternative signpost of modernity. Even though these women could not read or write, they became inspired and motivated with new ideas of freedom and equality; they travelled long distances educating other women about the need for national liberation and equality. Many women community leaders organised meetings, protests and conferences. They met at parks, fields and in remote places educating

people on the need for a referendum. These women were unafraid Kashmiri nationalists who did not shy away from questioning the actions of early Kashmiri nationalists, deliberated upon how they ditched the cause of freedom, and many critically analysed Pakistan's role in Kashmir's struggle for freedom.

By dismantling the notions of public and private, the community leaders personalised their struggle and held on to their political experiences as a source of education for future generations. They retreated from the street from time to time, only to become nurturers and raconteurs of that repressed political sentiment. They raised their daughters, educated them and gave them a sense of belonging to a community longing for freedom. Many women resorted to a matriarchal role which was exemplary; they did not marry, and some lived as single mothers. Over the years they memorialised these experiences in folklore and songs through which they kept alive the foundational political events that impacted their collective future. Through these practices and regimens, women educated future generations of Kashmiris about their forbidden history. The years of colonial education that teaches the history of anti-colonialism in India made no mention of the Dogras or the more recent history of the Indian rule dotted with violence and bloodshed. Thus, women of the era became the pedestal on which the repressed Kashmiri consciousness rests. There are folk songs that venerate Sheikh Abdullah for his contribution in awakening the repressed masses of Kashmir. Since women were performing traditional roles, it gave them plenty of time to capture glimpses of the politically turbulent times. Notably, since writing as a medium of communication was still inaccessible to the masses, the tradition of oral history drawing from the medieval practices of learning and modifying behaviour through communication and memory-keeping became an exclusively female domain.

In the armed struggle of late, the question of religion resurfaced, and women engaged with it in an attempt to challenge the way social patriarchy affects their lives. Their interventions involved inquiring into sacred texts and seeking solutions for modern problems. Through such reading of texts, all kinds of political positions could be articulated. It is only when religion or religious law consolidates power and exercises authority that a true interaction between 'sacred law', modernity and social conditions happens. For instance, Mir Hosseini shows in her work on the Iranian Shariah court systems that 'eventually, the veneer of sacred law wears off, what concerns people is what court systems can offer to

solve their everyday problems'. In that sense, the religious activism of Kashmiri women exists only in its liberational sense without subjection to its political/constitutional or statist power except in some cases, such as half-widows. It is only obvious that such an intervention offers an alternative political reality which is still in the making, offering women an escape from the debilitating reality of a political occupation. The escape into religion was further strengthened by the parallel armed struggle which could ensure that the knowledge of such laws can be extended to the wider population, hence creating an alternative political society which can then resist the subjection of the state. This invoking of religion does not keep women from engaging their political reality within the secular law of the land, as in the search for missing relatives or in fighting cases of sexual violence. Yet the existing political systems hardly resolved the problems that the women encountered. Unexpectedly, women's experiences within the resistance movement and their political action for gender rights show that Muslim societies are very much modern, but not like the modernity which is produced and applied in the West. Muslim societies develop an interface through which they choose and reject aspects of modernity that might contradict their accepted values. Thus, religious identity too operates as a modernising force, trying to rescue religious experience from its effective state to a more rational state.

A project such as the one spearheaded by Dokhtaran is uniquely modern, but it does not involve liberal ideas; instead, it engages Islamic ideals for the social emancipation of women. Though women have collaborated with the male leadership on traditional forms of resistance, in Dokhtaran's case, a radical opposition to traditional gender roles is present. Also, there are instances of conflict with the male leadership on wide-ranging questions, showing clearly how traditions are moulded. The advocacy for the veil is not presented as a method of control or subjugation but as a resistance to patriarchal notions of beauty that are projected by the state in its modernisation project. The veil is reinterpreted and reappropriated as a tool for privatising women's 'body' and subverting the male gaze. In this alternative modernity, women's rights are conceptualised differently from Western liberal ideals. Dokhtaran does not believe in secularism or the Western sense of equality between sexes. They argue, in Islam, that women and men are different in their roles but equal in their rights. They have different roles and duties; in some situations women have a better position, in other situations men are better placed, Aasiyeh Andrabi points out. Furthermore, she explains that men's physical capacity makes them

more suited to the responsibility of rule or power, and men are equipped to deal with crisis better. Women, on the other hand, are often short-tempered. Although they rest their notions of gender justice on essentialist ideas, their politics negates the very claims they make about gender. In defence of women's right to political action, Dokhtaran uses Quranic anecdotes and stories of Muslim women engaging in politics and provides it as a guiding principle for its members. Dokhtaran does not just engage in retrieving women's stories without their historical implications but constructs their new meanings in the political context of Kashmir. In their world-view, the Indian state is a representation of corruption and tyranny. The resistance movement is therefore justified for women in Kashmir who stand against immorality and corruption. It is an interesting example of historical anecdotes being reconstituted in a new context to give meaning to modern political events. Dokhtaran further provides examples in defence of its depiction of the Indian state in absolutist terms with the support of anecdotal evidence of 'witnessing' its brutality and corruption. The act of witnessing is central to generating such knowledge about the current political environment. The reintroduction of Islamic liberation theology was necessitated by the increasing awareness that the right to self-determination for Kashmiris was delayed because they were Muslim. As Mridu Rai in her historical work on Kashmir notes, 'the anti-colonial movement of Kashmiri Muslims against the Dogra ruler was not simply a movement of Muslims against Hindus but a movement of Kashmiri Muslims against a Hindu state'. In Kashmir, from the times of Dogra rule, struggling against the Hindu state has dominated political discussion. Thus, postcolonialism did not change the face of the state. With the failure of progressive secular movements, there was a rising awareness that Hindu domination was still prevalent. These factors emboldened the feeling of threatened Muslim identity.

Dokhtaran engineered a politics of piety that imparted to its followers proper moral conduct from which could develop a sense of moral politics. For their social activism, they have repeatedly come under heavy criticism and are known for their anti-liberal legacy. In 2006, Dokhtaran activists built pressure on the government when a massive prostitution network was exposed in the state. The sleaze racket threw up names of ministers and bureaucrats, most of them later acquitted, though the case is still pending in court. Dokhtaran claimed that the state provided patronage and support for women's exploitation and was consistently subjecting Kashmir to cultural aggression (which roughly translated to

the normalisation of rape and sexual violence). They further argued that state was promoting drug and alcohol usage in the state to divert Kashmiri people from seeking their political rights.

Dokhtaran's Islamicate politics began to propagate a brand of teachings that enabled cross-class and cross-sectional interchange among its women members. They actively fought against social hierarchies and systems that were exploitative of women. More than any pro-freedom groups, Dokhtaran vehemently launched an anti-patriarchy movement. Dokhtaran believed that the Kashmiri society was inherently male-dominated and its social organisation was to control women's liberty and restrict their choices. Dokhtaran started an intensive campaign against the social evils of dowry, exploitation of women in workplaces and economic exploitation in domestic spaces. They undertook door-to-door campaigns to create awareness about Shariah law and women's rights among the Kashmiri people. Dowry is an anti-Islamic act and detested in the Muslim holy texts (Quran and Hadith), and women's earnings belong to them and should not be snatched from them. The places women work at and the jobs women do must ensure their honour and respectability; professions that harm women's honour or jeopardise their social position are also against the Shariah law, they argued.

Apart from Dokhtaran's brand of Islamicate modernity, many organisations worked with women and used very different progressive potentials of Islam. The Islamic Students League, Muslim Khawateen Markaz (MKM) (Muslim Women's Centre) and the J&K Mass Movement are all instances of women's agency that employed a newer version of Kashmiri nationalism which was pitted against the statist idea of 'Kashmiriyat'. The state-backed narrative of Kashmiriyat portrays Kashmir as a non-hierarchical society and a cosmopolitan society where various horizontally segregated communities lived side by side without any conflict.

The ruptures in the statist ideology became apparent when the freedom movement of the people found expression in their Muslim identity. With Islamicate Kashmiri nationalism, a new protest culture was formulated. Women's entry into this project created a new generation of political agency within the resistance culture. Women paid very little attention to each other's piety or religious forbearance; the women's movement instead focussed on developing a political resistance to the ever-increasing Indian high-handedness. Entry into such a political project was not easy, because for this women were frowned upon by society; yet they chose these roles. The traditional patriarchy viewed women's role as unnecessary because

the arena of politics was designated for men. Women's politics was questioned using patriarchal interpretations of the religion. Many women observed the contradictory nature of Islamicate politics. While many women wore the religious veil to question patriarchy, many had to battle traditional expectations of compulsory veiling. Maryam, as an activist, had first-hand experience of these pressures—often, the fact that she did not veil herself was used to undermine her political positions. She defended herself and educated other women on how Islam actually viewed veiling, and that religious obligation could never be enforced.

MKM witnessed the deteriorating political conditions and social upheaval after the Muslim United Front election, which led to a full-fledged armed insurgency to achieve the goal of freedom. MKM was by then an experienced political outfit that had practised grassroots level outreach for several years. The militancy, backed and supported by Kashmiri people, initiated a crisis in society. They had to step up and reach out to a significant movement. MKM established district wise outreach programmes and assigned operation heads with duties to report on violent events. The reports contained details of casualties, medical emergencies and women's issues arising as a result of the military–militant conflict. The reports arrived from areas where the media was not allowed, and this information further confirmed the state repression. Through these outreach programmes, they contacted more women and created a flourishing membership-based organisation. These members were trained in political discourse and the methods of resistance amidst a large-scale armed struggle. In the event of protest calls, they were trained to alert each other to join the street protests and call out the atrocities. MKM members remember these marches as a phenomenal depiction of women's power and solidarity.

The armed struggle brought to fore new social crises, such as mass deaths or disappearances of men, exposure to violence and sexual violence as a tactic of war. On a social level, the justice systems were rendered dysfunctional; the social issues were lurking while society gradually descended into chaos. MKM women set up people's courts to bring justice to women's issues of social injustice such as dowry deaths, sudden unfair divorces and widowhood among others. They actively filled in for the lack of justice in the state court systems. Through these counter tactics, they made known their rejection of the legal and jurisprudential systems of the 'occupying' state. This empowered women to take up issues that have affected them personally and bring them justice, knowing well the suffering it involves and to make a direct intervention. However, with the

progress of time and the escalation in the counterinsurgency, the degree and incidence of violent death, sexual violence and injury felt overwhelming. MKM reached out to address the lack of education and information about surviving a sexual assault after they received reports of rape and sexual violence from their various district reporters. They visited these places and on many occasions found women were traumatised and did not know how to report the violations. The women in villages were raped and assaulted by troopers while they were attending to daily chores, performing farm labour or collecting firewood from the forests. MKM began several activities of educating or warning women against the dangers of sexual assault by the Indian troopers.

The armed struggle further emboldened the political agency of women in which the line between religious rights and women rights was quite thin. The project of women's active politics during the armed phase shows how they addressed the complexity of their political subjectivity. They imagined an alternate world in which the question of women's rights was deeply connected to their religious identity that was seen as under threat. In Dokhtaran's Shariah-dominated world, women are envisioned as rights bearers, enjoined by freedom and viewed as benefactors of social emancipation of the conservative world order. Dokhtaran's pro-women reading of Islam brings into the picture a contesting modern women's project that lies at the heart of the Islamic revival. Additionally, we see Kashmiri nationalism resurfaces in its Muslim identitarian form as a sort of amalgamation of new thought processes where discussions about women's rights are central to resistance politics. In its Muslim identitarian form, women bring questions of social and political injustice to the spotlight to envision a women's 'Free Kashmir'. Through these political projects women carved a strong political role for themselves, but the Indian state's negotiation processes reduced women political leaders to non-actors. The talks held between the Indian government and the armed groups or resistance organisations in Kashmir always kept women away from negotiations. It is a deeply patriarchal dimension of the Indian state that sees women political actors as either attendants or anomalies in the Kashmir discourse.

The robust counterinsurgency led to the ultimate consolidation of military occupation in Kashmir. The Indian military was strengthened by the colonial era laws which grant them impunity and extra-legal powers. Laws such as Prevention of Disrupted Activities Act (PODA) (removed), Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (TADA) and Armed Forces Special

Powers Act (AFSPA) held as the 'holy book' by Indian forces have been in use in Kashmir. In recent times, AFSPA has been thoroughly debated in the Indian mainstream for its assistance in the state-inflicted human rights violations. The ideological war in Kashmir manifests itself through the hegemonic interference of the military with civilian life. The rising militarisation despite the waning armed struggle points to the ways in which India is invested to keep Kashmir, militarily with or without Kashmiris. The military activities expanded from regular warfare to controlling resources such as cultivable land and orchards. The ideological war was expanded to education and humanitarian work as well. The schools and vocational training centres were employed as tools for creating Indians out of Kashmiris, reminiscent of Macaulay's attitude during British rule over the subcontinent. A new generation of Kashmiris arrived at the moment of their political consciousness under these complex conditions. This generation grew up under restrictions, perpetual mayhem and innate sense of victimisation. The resistance movement gained new strength in 2008, this time as a non-violent movement against the normalisation of deaths, usurpation of land and continued use of sexual violence as a tactic of war. The movement reinitiated a space for young women to raise questions about their living conditions and to seek different means to engage with it. Women's social and political role in the violent phase of struggle had paved the way for new questions and complexities to be addressed. Furthermore, the unending dance of death and enforced disappearances also organised women into more effective gendered social politics. The disruptions in the traditional gendered hierarchy through historical political action by women enabled the younger generation to interrogate and review these inherited political ideologies.

The new generation of Kashmiri women was disoriented by the duality of the protective covers of the family and the volatile public space. They experienced violations (such as crackdowns) of their private spaces only as anomalies and were never allowed to gain a political understanding of the situation in which they lived. This was often done to keep them safe. Their lives were often restricted to home and school, and most of the time schools also remained shut due to violent events such as bomb blasts, ambushes and encounters between the militants and the Indian state's counterinsurgency grid. For many women, such conditions often isolated them and they were left to their own devices and explored creative ways to express their feelings. They experimented with music, poetry and writing to vent out their feelings of confusion and dismay. The years 2008 to 2010

marked a new turning point in their lives. Many describe the self-discovery that the events in these years influenced as moments of reconnection with a repressed consciousness; a victory of sorts clinched by memory over enforced forgetfulness. These events were raising questions about the abnormality of the lived political condition such as curfews, clampdowns, detentions and violent deaths. What followed was a deeply felt urge to challenge this normalised everyday violence. The non-violent movement was raising urgent questions and attempting to bring world attention to the repressed aspirations of the people of Kashmir; the response to these was a further escalation in normalised violence. In 2009, Aasiya and Neelofer's rape and murder further attested this fact. By 2010, teenagers in downtown Srinagar began to express their anguish over lack of political avenues to effect change. In 2010, shooting at young boys began to become a new norm. About one hundred boys in the age group of eight to twenty three were shot dead; many of these were instances of targeted violence. Many young women lost their lives, and this consolidated the view that the state does not represent the Kashmiri people.

The young generation of women fluent in English engaged international influences in dress, ideas and praxis. They attempted to create a new identity for themselves. These women, donning jeans and hijabs, were raising questions about every normative gendered practice. Over time, markets in Kashmir have changed drastically under India's cultural influence. The ethnic dressing was changed from Pherans (cloaks) to Kameez Shalwars (tunic pants) in the 1950s. These dresses began to be promoted as symbols of modernity and progress as against the traditional 'backward' dressing of the Kashmiri women. In a bid to homogenise Kashmir with wider subcontinental Indian culture, the Kashmir valley's indigenous forms of dress were looked down upon with condescension and thereby endangered.

Through various self-reflective practices, women attempted to restore the traditional dress. They consciously mix various influences in their dress to reformulate a political identity that could resist various oppressive forces. The donning of hijabs (Arabic version of Muslim veil) has indeed become a political act that aids resistance to the project of homogenisation. However, unlike women elsewhere in the Muslim world, Kashmiri women attempt to include modernity (pertaining to dress) and make it subservient to the traditional ideals. The elements of modernity are made to fit the obligations of an 'Islamic' dress code that requires of Muslims (men and women) to dress modestly. These innovative ways have helped

women to negotiate for personal freedoms at the community level and also demand greater public participation at the political levels with the Indian mainstream.

Women, through writing, found a necessary space to interrogate ideas of resistance, gendered subjection and mechanisms of the state-backed military occupation. In this movement of writers, women attempt to take control of the meaning of their actions and contribute to the discourses on gender in war. The writers attempt to press a point about intersectionality when they become writers in unfavourable conditions—their vulnerability is almost the same as that of men. Writing is a political act under military occupation and so is being a woman in a patriarchal military occupation or being a Kashmiri in front of Indian soldiers. All these identities victimise women, and they must fight a single war that addresses all these issues and not just fight for a single issue, which is expected of them. Women writers in the English language responded to the universal discourses on Muslim women and started making rejoinders to writing about Kashmir. Women writers operate in the backdrop of normalisation of violent deaths, the stripping of rights and Islamophobia. Their struggles are centralised upon making sense of these imposed life conditions.

Many women chose to become journalists consciously aware of the dangers of such a profession under these political conditions. They insisted on becoming journalists because they sought to bring the truth out of Kashmir, being acutely conscious that truth is the first casualty in a war. Journalism, writing and art helped women to reconnect with the suffering people, and the imposed protective shells in which the respondents were shielded began to fall apart. They began to explore the landscape of occupation, visited places that had been inaccessible to them and witnessed the hinterlands and the formation of the frontlines of the war against the Indian state. The question of communal dignity and honour kept resurfacing in their quest for the meaning of life in Kashmir. Many observed that despite shortcomings, the pessimism of dealing with perennial military occupation and political restraint, the only way to live with dignity was through resistance. The respondents explored the theme of dignity and the ordainments of Islamic faith in their own work. They believed that to raise a voice against injustice is an Islamic duty. Writing and art enhanced the sense of personal autonomy and location of the respondents concerning the crises. Many engaged in public speaking and initiating intellectual debates around the future of the struggle for freedom. The perseverance

and objective reporting of these new-age women journalists brought a renewed international attention to the crises at hand in Kashmir.

On a collective level, writing served its political purpose of restoring a sense of self, cultivating ideas that best described their political environment and building a discourse to counter the statist narratives on the resistance movement in Kashmir. Many of these writers engaged in public intellectualism and informed each other's ideas debating the praxis and ideology of the movement for freedom. The issues of personal and political freedoms were interlinked and manifested in issue-based writing. The newer form of creative protest, of writers employing the English language, had to wrestle the notion of exclusiveness about the nature of their work. They actively diffuse that by writing about everyday issues like gender, cultural patriarchy and the political occupation. To take up writing often is dangerous in the given political conditions. The respondents of this study pointed out that 'pursuing a writing career as a means of protest in the prevailing political condition is dangerous for everyone regardless of gender'. Like women, men too struggle to convince their families to support them in taking up a career in journalism or using writing against the prevailing oppression. Many women put forth their reservations about the word feminism, while for some, it appeared unnecessary and for others, it feels like an imposition by the elite—who are seen as not always aware about the context.

Colonial modes and methods of education and the male-dominated social and political struggles make it cumbersome for women to secure a position in a public space *ab initio*. Traditionally, Kashmiri society has practised strong gender-segregation norms, and therefore in modern public spaces it is not easy to secure a place for women; it comes with its own set of absurd, yet complex challenges. Although women in Kashmir have a long history of working in the public sector, in the area of journalism the participation of women has not been proportionate to their overall numbers. In this context, a woman taking up writing and journalism as a career is a paradigm shift. In the phase of non-violent resistance, the work produced by these young women engages these questions of self-constitution. Many respondents report their work to be intensely political in a situation like Kashmir, whether they acknowledge the political nature of their work or not, it is the context that imparts meaning to their work, and their work only attempts to provide a description and an alternative view.

The legal branch of the Indian rule has proved itself to be incapable of delivering justice to the Kashmiri people. Amid the large-scale abuse of their rights, violence and war, traditional and religious systems are the only recourse. Hence the idealism of Islam is more appealing at times than the endless and often humiliating visits to police stations, courtrooms and residences of ministers and bureaucrats in search of justice. The recognition of their dignity and honour comes solely from the stories of Islam. They relate to sufferings of their ancestors and their perseverance as a source of inspiration to live under extremely oppressive circumstances. The religious inspiration also strengthens the role of memory as recourse against forgetting the violations committed against their people. To be able to struggle, memory becomes a fundamental weapon in the hands of the oppressed people while the state strengthens its propaganda. For young Muslim women writers in Kashmir, writing is not the next level of struggle but rather works complementarily to the struggles ordinary people face on an everyday basis. Although non-violent means are better in many ways and they uphold these values, it is the sacrifices made with blood that make the discussions relevant. As for writing, to write about similar humiliating experiences has allowed them to form collective resonances which challenge the means in place to sabotage people's experiences. The writers through their creativity are focussing on the strengths of women and how they empower themselves as against the narratives of victimhood that plague the question of Muslim women globally. In the non-violent phase of the struggle, women often from lower socio-economic classes who have come in direct conflict with the state have employed forms of agency that uniquely represent the gendered nature of the struggle as well as women's agency in bypassing the traditional patriarchy.

The failure in achieving justice for mothers and wives in Kashmir has further consolidated the views of the finality of the occupation of Kashmir. In the personal and collective struggles of Kashmiri women for justice, it became abundantly clear. In the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), we see the traditional role of a 'mother' being projected in a struggle concerning the enforced disappearance of Kashmiri civilians. While still resting on the cultural ideals of motherhood, unlettered women have claimed public space for a justified protest in a profound manner. The majority of Kashmiri people identify with this ideal; women embarking on this mission in APDP find more acceptance in the public sphere than ordinary mothers. The agency of APDP is in the fact that it has pushed the limits of what traditional motherhood could entail. A mother could give birth, educate her children and also, as APDP proves, fight for their lives

when such a need becomes manifest. There are limitations to what such an agency could achieve for women's rights, but it is only fair to judge it in the light of the resistance it puts up against the state's arbitrary use of violence. In cultural terms, it uses the traditional modes of congregation and remembrance and acts it out in an ingenious way for resistance.

Similarly, a plethora of cases of individual resistance of women such as Raziya and Munavar's struggle is unconventional, sometimes gaining support from 'traditional' roles and at other times stepping away from tradition to preserve their ideological positions. Munavar's awareness of her gender vulnerability often led to overcoming social problems through her moral integrity. In an incident that involved a young boy on the bus disrespecting her, she responded to him by claiming to be a morally upright person since that was better than being just a man or a woman. The strong sense of moral integrity could enable them to face all challenges with pride. Patriarchal militarism often forced women to overcome cultural forms of patriarchy and develop their autonomous modes of resistance. The gender roles were transported into carriers and networks to further ideas of resistance and struggle for justice. From Munavar and Raziya's stories it is evident that women, despite facing gender discrimination in both public and private life, exhibit agency in their struggle and attempt to mould patriarchal institutions to work in their favour. It is important to investigate the question of 'heroism' that women designate to their bodies through enduring bodily pain. They own their bodies and ascribe a sense of heroism to them which is different from the heroism societies ascribe to soldiers for defending their nation.

In Kashmir, on the one hand, the state narratives often highlight the return of peace and closure to violence, and on the other hand, the deep-seated reality of Kashmiri society is organised or unorganised violence, either as a robust military occupation or operating on the fringe as the armed violence of citizens. The large-scale armed violence of the 1980s which has given way to the largely peaceful struggles in the valley has no claims of absence of violence. The 1980s armed struggle opened space for militant women who could radically alter the social landscape for women, but during the non-violent phase, women's contributions branched out into stronger gendered forms of resistance. The non-violent resistance to even the more advanced military state has had a crippling effect on women through perceptions of sexual violence directed against women. During the armed phase, women could negotiate for their space much more radically within society, could take up central 'masculine' roles and exhibit power to organise on mass levels outside of domestic spheres. While

during the non-violent phase women's power to organise is less and the state easily ignores the female leaders during the peace processes. During the non-violent phase, a more creative class-based space is generated catering to the intellectual needs of women often belonging to a particular class. In Kashmir, the 1960s and 2000s showed a more hierarchical movement that flowed from the elite to the common masses and created a brand of ideas which became the driving force for anti-state narratives. During non-violent phases, the resistance performed by the lower classes is often more entangled with the real naked political violence of state, militarism and society, and thus is more radical and based on the ideas of morality, principles and questions of justice. These are not the drivers of the revolution but rather people in a position of worse oppression who struggle on a day-to-day basis to survive.

The struggles of young Kashmiri women who have metamorphosed into an expression of resistance through writing offer a critique of the discussion about the modes of resistance. Sometimes, non-violence is projected as a better way of fighting for a cause, but the young women see no dichotomy in the methodologies that people use to resist the dehumanisation of the occupation. Through writing, women challenge the class hierarchy within society and strive to present their own perspectives. After 2010, writing dismantled the space between the writers and sufferers. When Tufail Mattoo, a teenager, was murdered in cold blood in the summer of 2010, his sister immortalised him in an obituary. Raziya's son, whose father was killed in a fake encounter, writes poems about it. The Kashmir of today is sinking in the oppression and lawlessness of the occupation. The exploration of resistance politics in Kashmir shows women in Kashmir have never been silent victims but resilient witnesses, narrators and scriptwriters of freedom.

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